# HOW I BECAME A SPORTSMAN

BY "AVON"

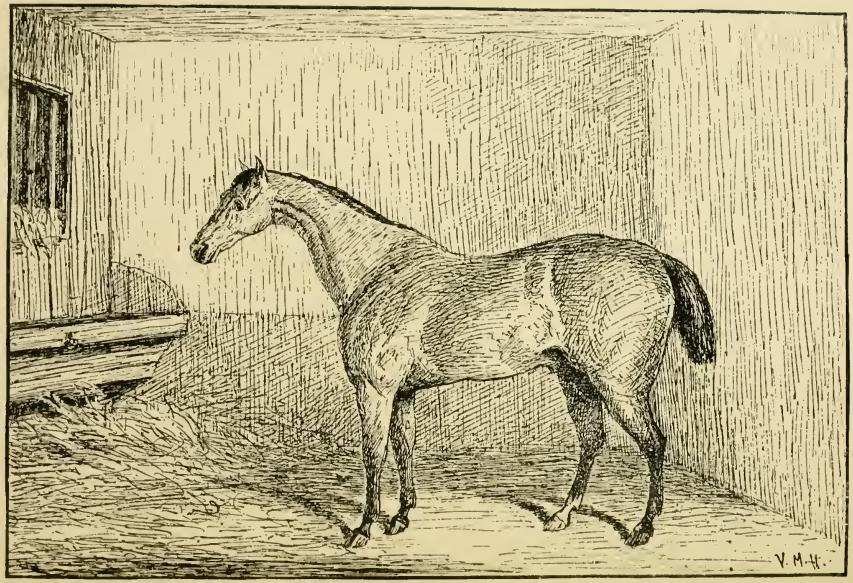
SHOUT
SHARE
IT

JOHN A. SEAVERNS

John Graham, B.A.
Linden Cottage.
Durham.

HOW I BECAME A

# SPORTSMAN




RAPID. *Frontispiece.*

# HOW I BECAME A SPORTSMAN

BEING EARLY REMINISCENCES OF A

VETERAN SPORTSMAN

BY

"AVON"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

VEREKER M. HAMILTON

New Edition

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL
LIMITED
1888

RICHARD CLAY & SONS,
BREAD STREET HILL, LONDON,
*Bungay, Suffolk.*

DEDICATED

BY PERMISSION TO

## Colonel W. T. K. Perry Keene,

MINETY HOUSE, WILTS.

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My Dear Sir,

In asking your permission to dedicate my little book to you, I did so on three grounds: first, that I know you to have been a thorough sportsman for nearly half a century. It is not every man who is equally at home across country, with the gun, and the fishing-rod; but I know that I may say so of yourself without a particle of flattery.

The man who could forge his way to the front over the walls of the Cotswolds, or the strongly-fenced and deep clay of the far-famed Braydon country, on a "Jovial," or creep, and have the best of it, on a mule, who could *do all but climb a tree*, needs no pen of mine to proclaim a fox-hunter.

Of your quickness in killing a *cock* I might quote an instance, and your zeal as a fisherman

is proved by keeping a tame pike to remind you that there are as good fish in the sea (or river) as ever came out of it.

My next ground was, that some of the incidents I have attempted to narrate may serve to remind you of a good specimen of a country gentleman and sportsman, a mutual friend (who is now, alas! no more), with whom we have enjoyed many happy days' sport.

My last ground was, that I have had the honour to serve with you in the "Tented Field," and I look back with pleasure to past days under your command.

I feel that what I have written of my early experiences as a sportsman are scarcely worthy of being published, but *ce que j'en escrit est pour une curiosité, qui plaira possiblement à aucuns est non possiblement aux autres.*

Allow me then to thank you for so kindly allowing me to dedicate my book to you, and with feelings of great regard for yourself and your family, to subscribe myself by my "*Nom de Plume*," which I adopted many years since from having, whilst hunting, plumbed the depths of the river from which I took it, three times in one season.

Yours faithfully,

"AVON."

# INTRODUCTION.

In venturing to place before the public this little work, the author does not for one moment attempt to claim for it anything more than an endeavour to give a hint to the embryo, or perhaps to amuse the more mature or declining, sportsman. As the title expresses, these reminiscences are the author's *early* experiences only, and must not therefore be expected to throw very much daylight on the subjects treated of. Nor must the reader expect any learned advice or dissertations on sport in general; still at times a point or two will crop up which the author considers to be crucial ones in making a good, bad, or indifferent sportsman, particularly in what relates to the *gun*.

With regard to that most charming and engrossing of all sports, "*The Noble Science*," the author has given little more than his first appearance with, and *entry* to, fox-hounds (hoping at some future time to add to them some incidents

of his later life, more worthy of the experienced sportsman's perusal), trusting that they may find a response in the increased pulsation of many a young and gallant heart.

Whatever merit these pages may possess, if any, the author feels a satisfaction in stating that the incidents related are substantially true, and contain *actual* experiences of his early life as a sportsman (of course with names and places slightly altered), and as such he must leave them: having said this much, he goes at it as he would at a bullfinch, viz., throws his heart over, and trusts with luck to get to the other side, safely he hopes, possibly with a scramble, but at all events without a fall, only asking the reader to be—

> "To his virtues ever kind,
> And to his faults a little blind."

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# HOW I BECAME A SPORTSMAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### MY FIRST GUN.

"Soon from the uplifted tube the mimic thunder bursts, the leaden death overtakes him, and with many a giddy whirl to earth he falls."—SOMERVILLE.

AN idea is sometimes forced upon me that I must have been born a sportsman, or at least with very strong sporting instincts, which very soon began to show and gradually develop themselves; or perhaps I might have imbibed them in my pap. Horses and dogs were my first loves. I have often heard my poor mother say, that after trying for hours to rock me to sleep, she would look in the cradle (the now fashionable *berceaunette* was not then invented) when she thought I was gone off, and there,

she would say, you were, with your great eyes wide open, looking like a woodcock. How little she thought how fond her precious bantling would be of that same woodcock when he grew up. And then she would go on to tell me that nothing would make me go off to sleep till I had been taken out in my night-clothes in the arms of old Tom, our man-of-all-work, to look at the horses. This seemed to satisfy me, and I would go off to sleep as quietly as the fondest of mothers could desire. Well, no matter how it came, the love of horses, dogs, and woodcocks was there; and as soon as I grew old enough, an insatiable longing for all kinds of sport, or anything connected with it, seemed to take hold of me, and has continued through life.

And now, when the evening of my days is fast drawing to a close, and the sinews and muscles begin to show signs of losing (though I am very loth to believe, and won't give in to it, for I am still able to take a fifteen or twenty mile constitutional) their wonted elasticity and firmness, the same keen love of hunting, shooting, and fishing gives a zest to all—such of them as my means will allow.

My father, who was engaged in professional pursuits, was a sportsman to a certain extent. He was very fond and a good judge of horses, and always kept two or three good ones. He was also a rare judge of cattle; and if he had not been cut off somewhat before his time, would have made his mark in the shorthorn world. But, fond as he was of horses and cattle, he most cordially hated a dog or a gun, particularly the latter. (His dislike of the former was occasioned by his having some of his pigs bitten by a mad dog; I just recollect seeing them raving mad, and their being shot.)

There was another thing which very much increased my sporting tastes and propensities. In my father's library there were, besides a few other books on sports, including Daniel's *Rural Sports*, a rare lot of the old *Sporting Magazine;* and long before I could read, every time I could get the chance I was continually looking at and devouring, with all my eyes, the engravings which they contained. I soon learned to know every one of them, and even to this day I can remember and describe them all; they made an impression time cannot, death only can, efface.

I have said that my father hated the sight of a gun, and I believe he disliked the sound quite as much, as he never would go near anybody who was out shooting; but that did not spoil his taste for game, to which he was particularly partial. Well, he had a gun all the same, but I feel sure he did not know it, nor was he aware of its existence, until that fact was brought to his knowledge in a manner hereafter to be told. I one fortunate or unfortunate day made the discovery—a fact which I kept to myself and a chum for some considerable time. As early as I can remember, any odds and ends appertaining to sport, such as an old whip or spur, a dog-whistle, an odd stirrup, parts of fishing-rods, or any other unconsidered trifle which I found lying about, had a particular and irresistible charm for me; and I carefully laid them by in a place of safety until they could be brought into use; and by the time that I was about twelve years of age, I had what I then considered a rare and valuable collection. At all events, it was unique, and when the gun above alluded to was added to it, was considered by myself and a sporting chum Ben (the son of an old poacher also

named Ben), whom I had made acquaintance with, almost perfect. I can recollect when I was very young nearly worrying my poor old grandmother's life out of her by continually teasing her to make me whips. The old lady tried her best, and I used to stand looking on, continually making suggestions, saying, "That's not the way," till the good-natured old creature would say, "There's no pleasing the brat," and would put on her bonnet, and march off to a toy-shop and buy me a whip. But I never took to anything in the shape of toys like most children; what I wanted was a real whip, "a man's whip." At length the old lady routed out from somewhere or other a colossal and dilapidated hunting-whip, which entirely satisfied my fastidious taste, and I prized it accordingly. It was rather an awkward size for so young a child; but no matter, it was a genuine article.

Young Ben was a year or two older than myself, and on account of his relationship to so sporting a character, was, in my opinion, an absolute authority on all matters connected with dogs, guns, and sporting appliances in general. In a sort of attic or lumber-room in the house there was an

Old oak chest, which had long lain hid;
We found it unlocked, and raised the lid.

And there (what a glorious find!), besides a magnificent bundle of broken fishing-rods and crippled walking-sticks, was a gun, a real gun, with lock, stock, and barrel all complete, and not a flaw to be found in it, barring the lock, which was certainly uncommonly stiff. The gun was exactly that cut so graphically described in the song 'The Old English Gentleman'—

"This gun it was old-fashioned,
A regular flint and steel,
Wide muzzled and a kicker,
It was heavy in the heel."

No matter, it was a gun, and from that moment I abandoned all thoughts of bringing into use a cross-bow, upon which, with the aid of a friendly locksmith, I had been a long time at work; and from that moment I centred all my energies upon the kicker (as I afterwards called it, and not unjustly), which was about six feet long, short in the stock, not very large in the bore when you got down below the first two inches, but being bell-mouthed, it looked as if it would scatter the shot well over a good-sized archery target; and I may as well

say at once, that its subsequent performance did not at all belie its appearance.

When my father was away from home on one of his hunting days, or I knew he was away on business, and that I should be perfectly safe from interruption, with the assistance of Ben, great preparations were made for ascertaining how this ancient but most interesting fire-arm would perform; and as it had so long lain hid it was necessary to be cautious. Accordingly, we began by degrees, first of all putting a little powder in the barrel, filling the pan, and snapping it off (my collection included some flints, which now came into use). We then determined to try a real charge, which having accomplished by ramming down newspaper on the top of the powder and shot by way of wadding, we tied the gun to a tree, fixed a target of brown paper at about thirty yards off; we then tied a string to the trigger, retired to a safe distance (my memory does not serve me exactly, but I rather fancy we took the precaution of getting round the corner of a wall), and let drive. Glorious was the report, and most satisfactory the appearance of the target! I

don't suppose gunmakers would have called it a good pattern, as it was considerably uneven —two or three shots close together, and then perhaps an interval of half a foot. No matter, the gun was a gun, would go off, and hit anything, as we agreed, and we at once proceeded to put into practice the attempt which is said to be inherent in every Englishman, which I suppose includes boys, "to kill something."

But whether it was our nervousness, the scattering of the gun, or the unsteadiness of a small boy trying to hold up such a lengthy piece, I don't know, but we had to give it up for that day without a single member of the feathered tribe coming to grief. The next attempt was more successful, having obtained some smaller shot, and also adopted the expedient of getting a rest for the gun, through the fork of a tree, or a friendly bank, until at last we became fairly successful. When I say we, I mean that I did all the shooting, Ben the prompting, general advising, looking on, and approving.

Shortly before this time I had made the acquaintance of a most valuable auxiliary in the sporting line. I was upon terms of nod-

ding with old Charlie, the drummer of the town band, who was a very great man in my opinion. He would be considered a queer figure for a drummer in these days; his dress (that is, his full dress) consisted of a long blue frock coat very high in the collar, very short in the waist, tight about the sleeves, and with a general appearance of there not having been quite cloth enough, the whole finished off with brass buttons, not many of them, but rather large, a pair of what had been once white buckskin breeches, bright tan leather gaiters, a large wide napless hat, a rather good-tempered-looking face, with a mouth always half open, showing two or three long, ragged, and yellow teeth; the whole surmounted by a pair of large green spectacles, and you have old Charlie the drummer. I had almost forgotten one article, upon which he particularly prided himself: that was a very wide, well-cleaned white leather band, which enveloped his neck to support the drum, and which gave him, as a finish to the blue coat, a sort of semi-military appearance. Whenever I had an opportunity I always "followed the drum," and at last got on speaking terms with

the drummer, who asked me to his house, and then introduced me to his brother "Willum." In appearance he was much on a par with Charlie, attired in just such another scanty, long-tailed, high-collared blue coat; but his breeches and gaiters, instead of being of leather, were made of the old-fashioned drab kersey-mere of everlasting wear. They had lost their original lustre, and from long wear had acquired an artificial one. "Willum's" face was the picture of good-humour, which shadowed forth his real nature. One peculiarity of his was, that he always had a large, clear drop at the end of his nose, which he never attempted to wipe off; and when he was at work at his trade, it was a great source of amusement to me to watch the drop getting larger and larger, until it fell into whatever work he was engaged upon; and when he caught me laughing, which he very often did, he would exclaim, "Ah! I s'pose my nose drapped again."

There was a daughter of Charles's, to whom I was duly presented, who rejoiced in the name of "Our Sarah Ann," aged about thirty, with whom I at once fell in love. It certainly could not have been for her beauty: she was short,

decidedly, with a small red nose which pointed towards the skies, that is to say, if a snub nose can be said to point; but what she wanted in good looks was made up by the family amiability. I believe I had serious thoughts of eventually marrying this young heiress; but "I never told my love," putting it off to that doubtful occasion, some day, when I might be in a position to take to her father's business, and retain the drummer, like Herr Von Joel at Evans's, always on the establishment. I found out that this young lady taught dancing and deportment generally, and had a class not of boys and girls, but of grown-up young men and women. It was never my luck to see the performances, but I can easily imagine it would have been a sight for sore eyes. I am much afraid that I took advantage of the good-nature of the family generally. I made use of Charlie by getting him to let me go with him to the clubs that he attended in his professional capacity, and as they always marched round the town on their days of meeting, carrying long white wands in their hands painted red from about eighteen inches from the tip, when I could, through his interest, get hold

of one of their staves I was in my glory. "Our Sarah Ann" I made use of by getting her to cook my game (as I could not take it home, it had before fallen to the lot of Ben) for me. It is true they presented, when served up, rather a spread-eagley appearance, the legs and wings standing out wide from the body in a manner which would have horrified a cook; but what did it matter? I thought them perfection.

On one occasion I made the whole family a present of a rabbit which we had somehow knocked over. Being in the summer-time, perhaps the rabbit could not have been considered exactly a *pièce de résistance* by more fastidious people; besides, it had rather a ragged, lanky appearance, and gave other indications of having recently brought up a young family. However, it was the first rabbit I had killed, and it was appreciated accordingly, no doubt.

To "Willum" I am afraid I was the most troublesome; but he never seemed to mind it. I was constantly in his work-shop (he was a lock and gunsmith), which shop was filled to overflowing with, to my sporting tastes,

treasures innumerable—old guns and parts of guns in all stages of rust and decay, barrels, stocks, locks, and ram-rods, which I was never tired of inspecting. I don't think anybody ever sent a gun of any value to "Willum" to be repaired. They consisted chiefly of poachers' guns, bird-keeping guns, and the like; and I should fancy the outside value of the best I ever saw there was about fifteen shillings.

There was another member of this interesting family, who always sat huddled up in the chimney-corner, and was called "father"; but whose father he was I did not know. He appeared to be very old, and when not engaged in coughing and wheezing, was always smoking.

Soon after I had made the acquaintance of this family, on going in one day I missed him from his usual corner; and on making inquiry, I was met by the announcement of "father's gone"; but whether he had taken into his head to go to bed or to go out for a walk I was not informed. I afterwards discovered that he was dead, and asked if any doctor attended him. "Willum" said no; he was only taken poorly the day before, and as

they had killed a pig, he made him a "nice drap of feeky guel," which being interpreted, meant, the flick or lard out of the pig cut up and boiled in the gruel. Whether it actually killed the old man or not I cannot say; but I should fancy it would have been too much for the stomach of an ostrich, let alone any ordinary mortal.

But I fear I have got off the line terribly, and have quite forgotten the gun. I had made by this time considerable progress in the art of shooting, sitting or standing; but flying I could make no hand of at all, which, with the length of the gun, and the time it took to go off, is not to be wondered at. I never succeeded in hitting anything, or at all events in bringing it to bag. By and by it began to dawn upon me that it must be the fault of the gun, and I consulted with "Willum" upon the advisability of converting it into a percussion. This he thought he could manage, and very kindly offered to do it free of charge; but I must give him time, as he must do it at odd times, so as not to interfere with his regular work. This of course I very readily agreed to; but I fancy my patience was considerably

taxed before the job was completed. The gun being conveyed in due course to the workshop, the first thing that was done was to cut about a foot off the barrel; and after months of waiting, a very satisfactory-looking weapon was turned out.

And though since that time I have owned guns by Boss Purdey, Dougall, Westley, Richards, Powell, Lancaster, Lang, Pope, Holland, and many other first-rate English makers, including a genuine old Joe Manton, I do not think that any of these eclipsed, in my estimation at that time, the delight I experienced in the possession of the converted old kicker. Strange to say, notwithstanding the mutilation, the gun was much improved in its shooting, and I soon succeeded in bringing down birds on the wing, but I shortly afterwards began to tire of such small deer, and longed for some more noble quarry. On talking the matter over with young Ben, he suggested moorhens, and said he could bring his father's old dog "Jack," a large, wiry, old-fashioned grizzly black-and-tan terrier, and great sport we often had with him. Jack was a capital dog for the sport, and managed to catch quite as many as I shot,

and many a luckless moorhen I succeeded in knocking over; but "Jack" had one fault—he would not retrieve, so that we lost many birds from their falling in the water, where we could not get at them. A happy thought occurred to me, and I invented a most effective retriever—simply a piece of hard wood about a foot long, with a piece of string long enough to reach across the other side of the river. Whenever a bird fell in the stream the string was unwound, the piece of wood flung beyond the bird, and hauled in. It of course very often happened that a good many throws were necessary to secure our prize, but we generally succeeded in the end.

One day, in walking down the river, a bird dashed up from under my feet and darted away like lightning. "What was that?" said I. "Snipe," said Ben. The very thing! and from that moment to snipe I devoted myself, not to killing them, but firing at them. I soon found out the likely places: in frosty weather certain spots down the river held snipe; and no matter how often I visited the places, the snipe were always at home. They did not seem to mind my firing at them in

"From that moment to snipe I devote myself." P. 16.

the least, until one day I managed to knock one over. He fell on the bank on the opposite side; there he lay on his back, and no efforts of mine with the retriever succeeded in getting him into the stream; but I could not lose such a prize as this, and decided to leave Ben to watch while I walked to a bridge about a mile down stream. When I got to the spot there lay my bird all right, and I shall never forget the feeling of satisfaction with which I carried it to "Willum." I also managed not long after to kill a wood-pigeon flying, and began to feel myself getting quite a crack shot, when my shooting for a time was suddenly brought to a full stop.

Whenever I wanted to use the gun I had to use great caution in smuggling it in and out of the house, and one day, having done that abominably stupid and dangerous thing, taken the gun into the house loaded, I hid it away in the usual place—a long square cupboard under an old office desk, amongst old umbrellas, shutter-rods, and other odds and ends; when, unfortunately, a younger brother got feeling in there for something, and the gun, as guns always will when they are not expected,

"went off." Great was the commotion amongst the whole family. My father was in the house, and somehow he intuitively fixed upon me as the culprit. The whole story was got out bit by bit. I was forbidden to go near "Willum" or Ben, and in other respects it would have been as well for this child if I had never found or seen that gun. I did not see it again for many years; how and when will be hereafter related.

However, I learnt one lesson from this catastrophe—never to take a loaded gun into a house again; and I never have from that day to this.

## CHAPTER II.

### MY FIRST PONY.

*"A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!"*

SHAKESPEARE.

I FIRST learnt to ride upon an old snaffle-bridle hunter of my father's named "Rapid," whose portrait still hangs in my breakfast-room, and a photograph of which it is intended shall form a frontispiece to these papers; and my readers will probably agree with me when I say he was a perfect model of a fourteen stone hunter, possessing breeding and power. He was a grand mover all round—one of the best walkers I ever saw, could trot twelve miles an hour, a rare galloper, was as good-tempered as he was good-looking, and one of the most perfect fencers I ever got across. If he had not been the latter my father would not have

kept him, as he, unlike his hopeful son, did not much relish tumbling about.

Rapid, when I first recollect him, was then, I believe, about twelve years old, and had been sold for three hundred guineas when in his prime. He was a blood bay, with three black legs and one white heel, and without speck or blemish; but how he came into my father's possession I cannot say, though probably through the well-known Smart, the dealer of Cricklade, as my father got most of his horses through him. I think I must have been about twelve years old when my dear kind old father used to take me out on the old horse and give me lessons, he walking by the side.

I was soon able to go out by myself, and many were the jumps I had, larking the old horse over the fences on the side of the road. He was a perfect safety conveyance, and never made a mistake; but his rider did, for I well recollect the first time I ever tried the jumping business was over a nice little tempting-looking rean (as they are called in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire), or watercourse, on Boxleigh Common. Now, this common was a

fine piece of short turf, as smooth as a lawn, except near the watercourse, where in soft places a few rushes grew. I had often tried a sweet little canter on this piece of turf, and one day, when I had duly accomplished my usual canter, and being elated thereat, I thought I would try a bit of a jump, and trotted gaily up to the (what I was pleased to fancy and call) brook. The old fellow made a slight pause, which I had not anticipated, and over I shot on the other side. I made a complete somersault, and landed on my feet. No sooner was I there than he was by my side; he had had no idea of refusing, but in my anxiety to get to the other side I was a little too quick for him. I looked about to see if anybody was looking, but I had the performance all to myself. I had, however, to lead him to the nearest farm-house to get put on again; however, I said nothing about it when I got home, thinking perhaps that my rides by myself might have had a sudden check. This I think was about the only time that I was ever clean thrown from a horse, though I have had hundreds of falls (every man who rides close to hounds must get more

or less). The celebrated Assheton Smith is said to have had a fall in every field in Leicestershire; but I think I have had more than my share, and some very bad ones.

I very soon got larking over all the likely-looking places in and out of the road (and unlikely ones too, for the matter of that), became quite *au fait* at all kinds of jumps, so much so that it began to get rather tame work, and I longed for a fresh steed of some kind or other; and having heard of an extraordinary donkey (it is a short step from the sublime to the ridiculous), I got leave from my father to borrow him, and arrangements were made that I might have him for a few weeks for his keep. I had heard wonderful talk of this animal, who was said to be able to do his forty miles a day. He belonged to a carpenter, who used to ride him backwards and forwards to his work; and as he was well kept and never ill-treated, he was supposed to have lost his donkeyishness, and to be quite free from stubbornness or vice.

I have often heard that donkeys are made stubborn from the hard and cruel usage they receive; I can very well believe that it is

developed and increased by such treatment, but I think there is a natural stubbornness inherent in donkey-nature, which no kindness can eradicate; at all events, my animal soon began to show the old Adam which lay latent in his system. On his arrival nothing would do but I must try him at once, and having got him duly equipped in one of my father's hunting saddles, which was a few sizes too large for him, with a pair of small stirrups and leathers from my own stores, and the girths knotted up under his belly,—being without that about eighteen inches too long,—and having armed myself with a good straight cutting whip and a pair of spurs, or rather, I should say, two spurs, for they were odd ones, also from my own stock-in-hand, I started—I beg the reader's pardon, I should say I tried to start; but not one inch would the brute move. I tried two or three vigorous cuts with the whip, for—

"I had a donkey that wouldn't go;"

and they had no more effect than hitting a bundle of hay. My patience would stand it no longer: in went the spurs with a will. That was a new sensation altogether to Mr. Ned.

The effect was immediate: away he bolted, but it was only for about fifteen or twenty yards, for seeing the coach-house door open, in he went, rubbing my knees most unpleasantly against the carriage-wheels, and no persuasion of mine, gentle or simple, would induce him to move again.

All this time my father was watching the operations over the blind of his study window, holding his sides with laughing, and with the tears streaming down his cheeks. He declared afterwards, that the absurdity of the whole performance so tickled his fancy, and he burst into such uncontrollable laughter, that he was quite powerless to come to my assistance, or even to call for help. Fortunately, however, one of the servants had also seen it, and sent old Tom the groom, who soon lugged me off, and took the animal back to the stable.

Tom said if I would wait till he had had his "bit of nunch" (he had just come in from delivering a note some five miles off for my father, and on these occasions always had some bread and meat, or cheese, and beer) he would go with me, and see if he could not make him go all right. Now this "bit of

nunch" usually took Tom just one hour by the clock; he ate very slowly, but kept on the whole time munch, munch, munch, with his mouth as full as he could cram. I promised I would wait for him meantime. I need hardly say my chagrin and disappointment were very great, as I had, I believe, intended going as far as Bristol, only about twenty-eight miles off, by way of a trial trip. If I had succeeded there is no knowing where my next excursion would have led me to; as it was, I sat with the spurs on and the whip in my hand, cogitating as to what was to be the result of the next move.

It was tiresome work waiting for Tom's hour, and give it up as a bad job I could not; so after a time I got my steed out into the garden, and thought I would try a somewhat shorter excursion, by riding him about the walks. Accordingly, up I got again. It seemed to suit my long-eared friend's notions better than going to Bristol, for away he trotted at once, and everything seemed to be going on as satisfactorily as possible to both parties, when, in an unlucky moment, some evil spirit tempted me to give him a dig with the spurs. It is one

of those mistakes that human beings are constantly committing—we cannot let well alone. Before I could say Jack Robinson, up went his heels, round went the big saddle, and I was on the ground; and Neddy, I suppose, thinking he could get rid of the spurs and his persecutor at once, galloped off with all his might; but, unfortunately, one of my feet hung in the stirrup, and I was dragged along the ground in anything but a dignified, and certainly a most uncomfortable and dangerous, position. He trod on my body, he trod on my hand, he trod on me everywhere; one of his feet went into my mouth,—at least, as much of it as would go in,—cutting it severely, and the marks of which I bear to this day. Of course in this predicament I did not forget to halloa. My cries of blue murder, or whatever they were, brought out the cook and housemaid, the former of whom, by making a sudden short cut across a border, succeeded in stopping the beast. Tom then came running out, with a knife in one hand and bread and cheese in the other. I was carried into the house with all the wind knocked out of me, covered with blood and bruises, and was soon undressed, washed, and

put to bed, with next morning a very fine development of gravel-rash, and a very handsome swollen face. My teeth were so loose I had to live on milk and sop for a week or so.

The next morning I was, as may very naturally be inferred, extremely stiff and sore; and the first person to visit me was the kind-hearted old cook, who entered my room and said, "Mornin', master John, how be 'e s'mornin', nice mornin' s'mornin', have a drop of coffee." This was said all in one breath; but I was only too glad to have any one to comfort and condole with me in my misfortunes. Thus, then, ended my acquaintance with this wonderfully quiet, good-tempered animal. I had had enough of donkey to last me all my life, such an impression (I might rather say so many impressions) did it make on me. After I had got over this little attack I was glad enough to go back to, and confine my attentions to, "old Rapid," and we got on very comfortably together for some time.

One day on going out for a walk with my father, he lifted me up to look over a fence at a black pony in a field at the back of the house belonging to a Dr. Beale; and from

that moment that black pony took complete possession of my thoughts by day and my dreams by night. I did not say much about it when my father showed him to me; but I fully determined I would see him again, and that very soon; and as the field where he was usually kept was only about three-quarters of a mile out of my road on my way to school, where the Rev. Dr. Carter daily endeavoured to instil the rudiments of Latin and Greek into me, I very soon made the proposed visit. The Doctor was an ignorant, idle, and severe man, and what he lacked in brains and assiduity he made up in beating. He literally drove the grammar into us by rule of thumb or cane of thumb, for whenever we made the slightest mistake we had to hold out our hands, and have what we called "a spat." It was of no use our drawing back our hands, which we almost involuntarily did (it only made him more savage), for in doing so we often caught the tip of the cane on the tips of our fingers or thumb, which was ten times worse than getting it on the palm of the hand.

But I am getting off the line. Well, as I was saying, the pony only lay about three-

quarters of a mile or so out of my way, so I used to start off as early as I could, and take a walk up to try and get a look at him. But this was not always successful, as sometimes he was out with the Doctor or in his stable, or he might be at the other end of the field. I had many fruitless walks; but no matter, when I did succeed I was amply repaid. But even this sight of him was attended with some difficulty; the hedge round the field was too thick and too high for me to see through or over, and the gate leading to the field was always kept locked. Now, this gate was so constructed as not only to keep the pony in, but to keep small boys out. It was when first made, no doubt, an ordinary five-barred gate; but it had been so well braided across, and also with uprights pointed at the top, as effectually to answer its twofold purpose, and the few peepholes that were left were of such narrow proportion as to afford but a very poor view. However, there was one way of attaining my object, which was by lying full-length on the ground and looking underneath the gate. I could get, if not a very comfortable, still an uninterrupted view. When the pony was

anywhere near it was difficult to tear myself away, and I was often late at school in consequence, and caught it accordingly.

I sometimes sounded my father as to the great desirability of my having a pony of my own, no doubt with latent thoughts in my mind as to this particular one; but he, as I thought at the time, turned a deaf ear to anything of the kind. I made all sorts of inquiries about the pony, and could gather that he was a perfect wonder, and that the Doctor used to frequently drive him to Bristol and back in a day, which greatly inflamed my desire to possess him. But I had not the remotest idea how this was to be accomplished, or that it was so soon to be realized.

In the course of time the old Doctor was gathered to his fathers; and soon afterwards his effects were advertised to be sold by auction, and amongst them the veritable pony. And when the day of sale arrived, I begged for a half holiday to go and see the last of him. My father said there was some rum about forty years old included in the sale, and he was going to see if he could buy it, and I might go with him. It was a pleasurable and yet a

melancholy afternoon for me, for I spent the whole time in looking, I thought for the last time, at the object of my adoration. In due time he was put up, and knocked down; but I in vain endeavoured to discover who was the purchaser. I should have liked to have stayed until his new owner took him away, but my father caught sight of me and took me home, much against my inclination.

The next morning after breakfast he sent me out with some message to old Tom in the stable, when outside, much to my astonishment and delight, there was a small pony phaeton, and in it a large hamper with the "old Jamaica." I was not long rushing into the stable, and in one of the stalls there stood "my pony." I was tearing up to make a more intimate acquaintance with him, when in an instant he was up on end, with his fore feet in the manger, looking as wild as a buck, showing the whites of his eyes, and giving plain evidence of the stuff that was in him, and that he was not used to small boys. Old Tom and my father came and coaxed him down, and after giving him some small slices of carrot he got quiet and reconciled to me and his new home. He was

about twelve and a half hands high, with a coat as long as a billy-goat, cat-hammed or goose-rumped, but with a small, thoroughbred-looking head, which was quite grey from age, long sloping shoulders, and with legs like iron bars, as clean as the day he was foaled.

I begged hard of my father to let me have a ride at once, but he was inexorable, and sent me off to school (he might as well have let me stop at home for all I learnt), but promised he would take me out the next day, which happened to be the Saturday half-holiday. He duly fulfilled his promise, but, much to my disgust, he took me out with a leading-rein, no doubt having his own suspicions of what the little rough-looking beggar might be up to. I got him at last to unbuckle the leading-rein, and we got on very well, with the exception of his nearly pulling my arms off. All he wanted to do was to go, and go he would, and did, in which I was equally willing to accommodate him. I found the pony, notwithstanding his rough coat and unpromising appearance, in good condition, as his late owner, no doubt from constantly taking long journeys with him, gave him plenty of corn. I very soon began

to try his jumping powers. When he had learnt I don't know, but he could jump like a cat, and no fence that a pony could possibly get over was too big for him; he had a mighty heart for a little one, and could breathe like the trade winds. He was not a scrambling sort of pony, but could gallop in good style, like a little race-horse.

The hunting season was just commencing, and having succeeded in getting a promise of a day from my father, it occurred to me that his long coat would be terribly in the way; besides, everybody had their horses clipped, and why shouldn't I, as I wanted to turn out in proper form? So having enlisted the services of a younger brother, we determined to clip him ourselves; and having collected all the combs, scissors, and candles we could lay our hands on, we waited quietly in our room until the house was quiet. At night we got out, and smuggled him into the kitchen (he had got so used to us and so quiet that he would follow us after a bit of bread anywhere about the house, round the dining-room table, or, I believe, he would have gone up-stairs), and to work we went; but we little thought what a

tough job we had set ourselves. The coat was woolly and tough, the scissors were blunt, the light was bad, our fingers got sore, and we very soon heartily repented having begun our undertaking; but having made a beginning (of course we did all the easy parts first), we were bound to get his coat off somehow. We did at last get some of it off, and it was certainly somehow; and when the cook came down, long before it was daylight, great was her consternation to see what we were at, and what a mess we had made; but, like a good-natured soul as she was, set to work to help us, and when daylight at length arrived, a pretty figure the animal cut. We had not touched his head or his legs, and where we had been at work, in some places it was quite bare, and in others there were large strips of snotched hair, making him look something like a very badly-prepared zebra. But we had to clear out, as it was getting near breakfast-time; so we concluded that we would get old Tom to finish him, after which he gave him a most vigorous singeing, and he then looked somewhat more presentable.

My father tried to be very angry with us,

but the sight of the pony was too much for him, and it ended in a hearty laugh; and he said, "As you have done him, you must make the best of him; but I cannot take you to the meet with such a little hedgehog as that." By the way, he very seldom went to a meet, but started late, relying on his knowledge of the country and the general run of foxes, and contrived to pick them up.

The reader may guess I was not behind time when the governor was ready, although my get-up took some considerable time and pains to accomplish: a pair of white duck trowsers drawn over the ordinary ones, and the two tucked into a pair of shining leather gaiters, called antigropelos, the spurs of course, and a natty new hunting-whip, the gift of my mother, completed what I flattered myself was a very correct and sportsmanlike costume. My father (who always turned out exceedingly neat himself), I thought, began to hesitate whether he would take me at all, and having compared the pony to a burnt cat, to which I retorted that he would find he was better than he looked, we started. I had strict injunctions to keep with him if we fell in with

the hounds, which after some time we did, in full cry crossing the road in front of us; but the keeping with him, as the sequel proved, was easier said than done. But now, as Mr. Somerville has it,

"'Twas triumph all and joy,"

for a very short time though, for, *nolens volens*, I was soon carried to the front (it was not quite my first appearance with hounds, for I had had one or two little goes with the old horse on the quiet).

Leaving my father and his injunctions far behind,—indeed, I had too much to do to take care of myself to be able to attend to them,—we had a glorious run of what appeared to me to be about ten miles (I believe it was really about two) to a wood, into which I went helter skelter. Some one hallooed out, "Hold hard! hold hard, you little beggar on the pony! hold hard!" I held as hard as I possibly could, but the deuce a bit could I stop. He went all down the ride, which was very muddy, as hard as he could lay his legs to the ground. When we got to the end of the ride he condescended to stop, I have no doubt

because the music of the hounds had suddenly ceased.

I looked back, but could see no one, so I looked outside, and instantly caught sight of a man in green livery about three hundred yards off on a grey horse, holding his cap high in the air, and both he and his horse were as still as if cut out in marble. I at first thought he was holding up his cap for me to go up to him, but as he looked straight to the front, apparently intent on some object, I thought better of it (and lucky for me I did). In another instant he clapped on his cap, put his finger to his ear, and gave a piercing scream, with a rattling view halloa, "Tally ho! gone away!" In an instant the whole scene was changed from grave to gay, from still to active life; the whipper-in and his horse were all action, life, and energy. The reader may see just such a picture as this presented, in Fores's shop in Piccadilly at this moment, except that the whip is clad in scarlet instead of green.

In less time than it takes to write it, out came the hounds, followed by the field, and away they went again with a most melodious

cry, which appeared to have a maddening influence on my steed. He seemed to understand all about it, for away he went again like the very devil.

"D—n that little beggar, he's here again," I heard another man in green exclaim; that was the huntsman, the celebrated Bill Long, then in the zenith of his fame. I don't know exactly what I did or how I got there, but after tearing across country for some time I was close at hand, when there was a confused heap of growling, snarling hounds a-top of something in the corner of a field, into which heap the first whip in green that I had seen on the grey went, and soon emerged with the dead fox. This was Charlie Long (nephew of the huntsman), then perhaps the best first whip and most promising huntsman in England. (Years afterwards I followed him over the hog-backed stile which gave him the fall that caused his death.) The dead fox was then denuded of his mask and brush, and his body given to the hounds.

I was covered with mud from top to toe, and so was the pony; but I was rather glad of that, for it hid his patches. My face was

scratched, and the blood dripping down on my once white ducks. I saw the huntsman talking to my father and laughing.

"Come here, youngster," said the former. "You are a plucked un', anyhow; but I thought you were doing your best to spoil our sport."

The whipper-in then daubed my face with his bloody fingers and gave me the brush, which I crammed into my pocket. I saw one gentleman take out his watch and say to another, "Just thirty-three minutes." Another I heard say to a friend, looking at me as he spoke, "A very brilliant thing." What a little fool I was, I'll be hanged if I did not think his allusion had some reference to me; but on asking the governor, he quickly undeceived me.

However, I was now a fox-hunter duly entered to fox-hounds, and that with perhaps the finest pack in the world, for they were the far-famed Badminton hounds. I soon after saw my father taking what I thought was an opportunity of shaking hands with the whip; but as he touched his cap, and afterwards fumbled his hand to his waistcoat pocket, I conclude it was something more substantial. Not long

afterwards my father called me, and I went home the proudest and happiest boy that day in England. I should have liked to have stayed for another run, but the governor had issued his fiat, and I knew, by a very quiet but determined look which he gave, he was not to be disobeyed.

It would weary my readers if I recorded all the runs I was in with this varmint little beggar, the narrow escapes I had, the scramblings and tumblings I got, and the amount of damson-pie that fell to my lot, during the time I rode this really wonderful pony. Suffice it to say, that I rode him, or, rather, *he carried me*, because he generally went just where he liked, for several years. He was never tired, never fell down, seeming always to have a leg to spare; though come down on his nose or knees he did very often, but he was so quick, he was up again before he had time to fall. He had the activity and cleverness of a mountain-goat, could jump like an antelope, and the courage of a thorough-bred horse. As long as hounds were running he was all right, as he could then gallop to his heart's content, though it took me all I knew to

steer him clear of members of the field who were hesitating at the fences or at dangerous obstacles, as go he would, no matter who or what was in his way, "at it, over it, or in;" but when hounds were trotting from one covert to another my chief difficulties began. It seemed to make no sort of difference to him whether hounds were running or not, the sight of them moving along seemed to drive him mad, and as long as they were in sight or hearing, he wanted to keep on galloping; and as the hounds went into a field at one gate, I was obliged to go in with them and gallop all round it, so as to emerge at the gate out of it at the same time as they and the horsemen did; in doing which he was in such a desperate hurry he generally managed either to rub my knees against one of the posts on either side of the gateway, or to knock up against some one's horse, with the not impossible chance of getting my brains kicked out, or else running my thighs up somebody's spur. If the gateway was particularly narrow, and a great crush to get through, he always contrived to get me in the thick of it. If there was any opportunity of running over

the hounds he would be sure to take advantage, and I picked it up from the huntsmen or whips in consequence. I recollect Bill Long saying to me on one occasion, "There, get along in front of the hounds and there stop, and perhaps you two will be satisfied." Many a time my arms became so numbed and tired from pulling at him that I have put one of the reins over my shoulder, and leant against it, by which means I could pull his head into his breast, and somewhat control his pace.

I was not like the ordinary run of "plum-pudding boys," only out during the Christmas holidays, when sportsmen endure such nuisances, knowing it is only for a time, and a good many of course having boys of their own; but I was constantly out, and got liked accordingly, though they could not help laughing at me for the scrapes I was constantly getting into and the mischief I caused. How he got over some of the fences I don't know, but what he could not jump he would run over or scramble over or through in some seemingly impossible way, which I am utterly unable to describe; but get to the other side somehow he would and did. Many a rough-

and-tumble scramble he got; but he managed to save an actual fall, and the deeper the ground the better it seemed to suit him. We often hear, and it is really the case, that nothing but a good one and in condition can go through deep ground. I suppose from his lightness and that of his rider he went above it; I can answer for it that no pains were taken with his condition, and yet he was always ready and fit, and the further he went the more it seemed to bring out the gallant stuff that was in him. I have since that time owned more than a hundred horses, and amongst them many clippers; but I can safely say, that I never had anything with half the speed (for his size), the cleverness, endurance, and indomitable pluck that this poor old fellow had. At length he began to fall off in condition, could not feed well, and as I was getting too heavy for him, besides I had been promoted to a bigger, though not a better nag, and my father did not care to let my younger brothers ride him, the edict went forth that the poor pony was to be shot; he was much too good a sort to be allowed to spin out a lingering existence in any ignominious way.

A grave was dug, and the man who was to carry out the sentence came for him, and thinking to save his own legs, got upon his back to ride him down, when the poor, worn-out-looking old fellow immediately ran away with him, to his extreme astonishment.

"Still lived the ruling spirit strong in death," showing at the last a spice of his quality, and dying, as he always had been, game to the last.

It was not with an undimmed eye that I went into the stable and took my last look at "my first pony." Thus ended the career of the very best animal that ever looked through a bridle.

## CHAPTER III.

### A BLACK DIAMOND.

"Happy the man who, with unrivall'd speed, can pass his fellows, and with pleasure view the struggling pack."
—SOMERVILLE.

As I believe I before stated, before the old pony was put out of the way, I had been promoted to another steed. This was one altogether of a different stamp: he was a very well-bred and good-looking black hack that my father had seen going by one day, found out where he was being taken to, and went over and bought him. He was about fourteen hands high, with a small thorough-bred-looking head, light neck, and most perfect shoulders; but behind the saddle he was plain, for he had wide ragged hips and a very ugly tail, which was about as long and as stubby as a worn-out besom. He was deep in the girth, had

excellent legs and feet, and looked all over as he was—a most perfect, temperate boy's hunter. I was very soon on his back and tried his hand at jumping, and was delighted with him, for I found him as clever and as willing as old Rapid. This was the very animal for me, for he was very fast though very quiet, and had a capital mouth, and required nothing more than a snaffle-bridle, which I always rode him in.

Now, it was a great wonder that my hands had not been completely spoilt by riding such a little tearing devil as the old pony, for though he was quiet enough in an ordinary way, and did not pull so very hard, the moment he saw or heard the hounds he seemed to have no mouth to speak of, for I could make no more impression on it than pulling at a house. I say it is a wonder that my hands had not been irretrievably ruined, but my good old father, who had a capital seat and hands himself, took great pains and care to properly instruct me in both, and I had been so well grounded by him in my lessons on the old horse, that when I found myself mounted on "Black Diamond," as he was

called, I was quite at home, and we really got on so well together, that when I went out with the hounds, I, who had been looked upon with horror, avoided, abused, and generally wished at the devil, quite recovered my character for a time; but, unfortunately, I got into hot water again with one or two other animals, particularly with a roan mare which I rode for many seasons, and of which more hereafter.

I was formed by nature for a good seat on a horse, and without a good seat a man cannot have good hands. If I could not have ridden Black Diamond without getting into scrapes it would have been my own fault, and during the two years I rode him, I thoroughly enjoyed hunting, and had many capital days with him. He was as fond of jumping as I was, and the reader may depend upon it I was nothing loth to indulge him in it. What places I used to shove him at he would go at them best pace and fly them, or he would creep like a goat at any cramped place, and would pop into and out of a narrow lane with only a few yards between the fences as clever as a cat.

It was quite a new and most delightful

sensation not to be hauled about at the will of a mad little beggar, who didn't care where he went. I was now allowed to go out with my father, who seemed always pleased to see me take my fences as they came, and like a workman, as he said; whereas after my first appearance on the old pony, he took precious good care never to go out with me, nor indeed to go out on the same day, always, when he allowed me to go, sending me off to distant fixtures, and keeping the near ones for himself.

I cannot call to mind that Black Diamond ever gave me a fall, and if I am correct in this, I believe it was the only time in my life that I went so long a time without one. I have since had three, four, and even five in a day, but that was when I was riding young and unmade horses, which I took a fancy to do at one time, ay, and liked it too for some years; but after a long course of this sort of thing I got tired of it, after having as much knocking about as falls to the lot of most men, and took to riding horses of good figure and character, which had passed through good hands, and were supposed to have seen their best days; but I found I could go along

as fast, and wherever others did, mounted upon much more expensive animals.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. What I could do others can do, and I can only say, that if I had my time over again, I would leave the riding and making of young horses to those who are paid for it, and ride only ready-made, if even second-hand, horses. But what one takes a pleasure in at one time of life we think of with very different feelings as time goes on, and I suppose it will be always so.

There is an old saying, that a candid confession is good for the soul, and I am going to make one. I was never in my life very fond of going best pace over rough ground; I mean when your horse is thoroughly extended, and going at all but racing pace. I verily believe that this really requires more nerve than jumping the biggest fences. I have known men who would hardly jump a sheep-hurdle, and yet would go like steam across ground covered with ant-hills, or even rabbit-burrows, the most horrible traps you can find, and which give the worst of falls, the most imperial crowners. Again, I have known men

regular gluttons at fencing, and yet afraid to extend their horses even where it is all plain sailing, let alone ridge and furrow, which, without good shoulders in the horse and good handling on the part of his rider, takes a little doing. The best plan I think is to let your horse alone as much as possible. Half the horses are pulled into making mistakes, rely upon that. Not only the hand but the finger is necessary at times, so fine must be the touch or feel between the rider's hands and the horse's mouth. Horses won't make mistakes if they can help it, and the surest way is to leave them to themselves; but then it requires great nerve and confidence. As a proof that a horse will take the greatest care of himself when not bustled or pulled about, you have only to watch a huntsman going, we will say, across a piece of ridge and furrow, with very short and high ridges, or perhaps across a piece of a covert which has been cut down recently, leaving the sharp ends of the hazel bushes sticking some nine inches or a foot above ground. The huntsman's cares and anxieties are with his hounds, and he is so intently watching them, that he is not looking at all

to his horse, leaving him to take care of himself, and yet how very seldom does he make a mistake; and then you must remember that a huntsman's horse has to do a good deal more work than that of any of the field, and of course gets a good deal more taken out of him. Also remember that wind is strength.

Well, I was not exactly *afraid* of giving best pace across such ground as I have described, because I rather fancy my nerves were pretty good, and I never cared what the fences were; still I did not *exactly* enjoy it, and always liked to feel my horse going well collected, and within himself. Now I fancy this dislike to going *very fast* over rough and broken ground, or indeed at any time, comes from having been carried *nolens volens* in such a tearing, reckless fashion by the old pony; in fact, he used regularly to run away with me, so that is the whole and sole truth of the matter.

I knew one man with the most perfect seat and hands imaginable; he always turned out in faultless dress and appointments, he rode first-rate horses, and to look at the *tout ensemble*, you would have thought he was a first flight man: but he could not go across country; the

right stuff was wanting. I don't know where his heart was, but it certainly was not in the right place. I once saw him jump a gate though, but it happened in this way: he went up to a gate, and was reaching down to open it but found it locked; as he was just drawing himself up, I suppose he must have touched his horse with his long-necked spurs, for over he popped in a moment; but although taken by surprise, the rider did not move from his right place in the saddle, thus showing that his seat was good and firm; it only wanted better nerve.

I knew another gentleman of a totally different stamp, who took a house in the country where I then lived, brought down some good horses, and began to hunt when he was nearly sixty years of age. He had been a London merchant for many years, and had just retired with a considerable fortune. He had, I dare say, learned to ride early in life, and must have had a natural love of horses and hounds, but circumstances had probably prevented his entering into the pleasures of the chase. When he first commenced hunting, although he seemed to sit his horse very well, he could not manage

the fences at all; but he was not afraid to go at them, and he fell off constantly. He fell off behind, he fell off in front, he fell off sideways, in fact, he fell off in every way that it was possible for him to accomplish; at last he seemed to get the better of it all at once, and he kept on until he could ride as well as half the people out, and from laughing at him people began to respect and admire, for that bit of thorough British pluck and determination which overcame his neglected education in horsemanship. His heart was in the right place, and a real good hard one it was too, so far as jumping went, for when he had once mastered it he never seemed to care how big the places were.

A vast number of people who go out don't care a fraction about the hounds so long as they go fast enough. I was never one of this sort, for though I was extremely fond of riding, I loved to watch the working of the hounds, and always took great interest even in what is called a woodland day; in fact, I rode to hunt, and therefore I always preferred a good hunting run of an hour or an hour and a half at a moderate or fair pace, to a twenty minutes

burst at a racing one. I am pretty sure a great many people will say I am old-fashioned in this. Well, so I am, I confess, for I love the real hunting part of the business, and as soon as hounds began cub-hunting I was sure to be there. Master and huntsman like very well to see an interested follower of the craft out with them at any time; but they mutually hate a man who comes out to heat or try a young horse when they are entering their young hounds. If you keep quiet, and sometimes you may make yourself useful, they are glad to see you; but if you come out to show off, or for a gallop, you may be wished a long way off. How delightful it is to meet the hounds, say at five o'clock of a lovely morning in September,—as Somerville says,

"What sluggard now
Would sink in beds of down,"—

in such a delightful spot, for instance, as Swan Grove in the Duke of Beaufort's country, or Cirencester woods in the V. H. H. on such a morning as this, with their beautiful elastic green rides, and the music of perhaps sixty couple of hounds to cheer your heart.

How often have I ridden ten, twelve, or

fifteen miles to such a meet as this, home to breakfast with such an appetite as can only be obtained by strong exercise in pure air, and then gone for a long day's partridge-shooting. For many years I always made it a practice to go out cub hunting on the first of September, if I knew where they were, and I generally had the information sent me. It was a sort of opening of two different seasons on one day; but was it not almost too much enjoyment at once? I have often thought that perhaps I was burning the candle at both ends. Well, it could not last for ever, and it is as well to get as much enjoyment out of this life at the time as one can, being always with the proviso, that these enjoyments are pure and healthful. I feel sure that to much of my present robust health and activity, although threescore years have come and gone since I first saw the light, I am indebted to having taken as much exercise of all kinds as I could get, and passed most of my time in the open air. The poet Dryden says,

> "The wise for cure on exercise depend;
> God never made his work for men to mend."

And I am quite convinced that exercise, combined with moderate (if not absolutely spare)

living, to some constitutions, and attention to the good things of this life, will enable a man to pass the latter years of his life with more pleasure to himself, with less trouble to others, than falls to the lot of those who live a life of ease and luxury. "At forty," says an old proverb, "a man is either a fool or a physician." Well, be your own physician, I say. If you feel that you have put on flesh, and have got beyond your normal weight, the calves of your legs getting smaller, the waistcoat wanting a reef let out, and a general feeling of disinclination to take long-continued or strong exercise, why put on the muzzle at once, stop the supplies in time, and put on the steam instead; take as much exercise as you can get, no matter of what sort. The less you feel inclined for take the more. Any young sportsman, just entering on his career, who reads this and follows it, who begins to get on in years and increase in weight, will thank me when he gets old; and above all, I earnestly recommend to all young sportsmen, to enable them really to enjoy the sports of the field, to be abstemious, and to such a one I can wish nothing worse than to have a better mount than "Black Diamond."

## CHAPTER IV.

### MY FIRST OF SEPTEMBER.

"At sere September's early dawn,
As seasons still come round,
With his pointers in the stubble,
He was certain to be found."
*Old English Gentleman.*

Before I was twenty years of age I had become my own master, through the much-lamented death of my dear father; and having, as I have said, early developed most undoubted love for sport, and having had the shooting over a nice little estate of about four hundred acres, not very far from the town where I then lived, offered to me, upon the understanding that I should put a man to look after it, and keep off trespassers, and, in fact, preserve it, I was tempted to take out my first certificate to kill game. I had become a fair shot at snipe, rabbits, wood-

pigeons, moorhens, and an occasional wild duck or widgeon, but I had as yet, of course, not killed a head of game.

I had a gun by that excellent maker, John Manton; it was rather small in the bore, sixteen, but it was a very hard hitter, and only required holding straight; so what I did not kill at fair distances, might be put down to the fault of the shooter, and not of the gun.

There was a tall, active young fellow, who earned a good bit of money at times at his work as a sawyer, who I had found out understood a good bit about game and shooting; in fact, he was a little bit of a poacher in a harmless way, and always kept a good ferret or two. I had had him out with me rabbiting on several occasions, and fancied he was just the man I wanted. Accordingly, I had made arrangements with him to look over my ground, which he was uncommonly pleased and proud to do; and I subsequently found him an excellent and able coadjutor in shooting and fishing.

There was, besides, another temptation to me to commence shooting in real earnest; there was, adjoining my ground, a large com-

mon called "King's Heath," containing about one thousand acres of all arable land, upon which a good many partridges bred. This land had been given by King Athelstan to certain freemen of the borough in return for the assistance they had rendered him in his defence against the Danes. Now this common had in course of time become subdivided into portions from one acre up to twelve; so that it was not worth while any one attempting to preserve it for the sake of shooting, although, as I have said, there were a good many birds and a few hares bred there.

I believe some gentlemen did once agree with the committee of management to give them a price for the right of shooting for one season. But it would not work, as every man, if he chose, might claim the game on his own ground; and so many of them had been in the habit of knocking over whatever they could come across, that the attempt was given up once and for ever. As a proof that it was a good breeding ground, a relative of my own, an old captain in the navy, came there for several years to get the shooting of the first few days in September. He was an old-fashioned

sort of fellow, very slow and deliberate, and one of those poking shots who took a steady aim at his birds by looking all down the barrel of his gun. But he was very sure; he made a practice of never cocking his gun till the birds were on the wing; and when his dogs stood, he was in no hurry, but generally pulled out his box and took a pinch of snuff. On one occasion he killed twenty-four brace of birds on this very ground; but there were few shooters in those days, the stubbles were knee-deep, and the undergrowth of weeds and long grass was abundant. He had a brace of good old-fashioned, steady pointers; birds were plentiful, and he rarely missed a shot. He did not shoot at wild birds, and if he did not feel sure he would pull his gun down from his shoulder and wait for a better opportunity.

This is not the style of shooting I like—the slow, steady, and sure; I would rather see a man miss a shot now and then than be always picking his shots. You should be measured for your gun by a first-rate maker, and it should fit you as a coat would made by Poole. And then all you have got to do, if your eye is correct and your nerves in good

trim, is to look at your bird, fling up your gun, and if your eye and finger act in concert, down he comes. A great deal has been written lately in the columns of the sporting papers about making allowances for the pace birds are going, and for their flying in this direction or that. I maintain that no amount of pen-and-ink work will teach this, and nothing but actual practice and experience will suffice. There are shooters and shooters, and it is not every man who handles a gun that makes a first-rate shot, let his practice and experience be what it may, simply because he is constitutionally unfitted for it. I have known men who could not shoot in company, but when by themselves performed very creditably; while others would be the very reverse, the very fact of some one looking on seeming to brace their nerves.

I knew an old farmer who often used to go out with his landlord and myself, and it was by a rare chance that he ever hit anything; but he always used to fire at the same time we did, and then swear that one or two of the birds we had killed were his. One day when we were out he went off for a few

minutes to help up a sheep which had got on its back, and put his gun down against a tree, and I took the opportunity of extracting the shot. We said nothing when he came back, but went on beating the ground. Presently the dogs stood; we walked up to them, and up got a splendid covey of birds about thirty yards off. We fired all six barrels, and down dropped four birds. Old F. said very quietly, whilst he began to load, "Did you kill, sir?" addressing me. "Didn't you hear me shoot?" said I. "That's my bird on the left," said old F. I said "Oh, no; I killed the two left birds, and the Squire the two which fell to the right." "I'll swear, if ever I killed a bird in my life, that's my bird."

We could stand it no longer, and burst out into uncontrollable laughter. "Whatever are you laughing at, sir, what are you laughing at?" said old F., continuing to load with all the coolness in the world, and looking very pleased; for I verily believe he thought he had killed the bird. Old F. then began to get serious, then red in the face, and although I never saw him commit himself before his landlord, before or since (he had a goodish

bit of Welsh blood in him, and was rather peppery), he got into a passion, and began to swear that he killed the bird. "By G—d, sir! that's my bird;" and away he went and picked it up. "That's my bird, sir, if ever I shot a partridge in my life."

This only made matters worse; the tears ran down my cheeks. Poor F. stared with all his might, but gradually cooled down, still holding the bird out at arm's-length between his finger and thumb, in a way I cannot describe, but which he appeared to think was evidence of his having killed it.

The squire rolled on the ground with a pain in his side from laughing, and it was some time before we could quiet ourselves down sufficiently to tell him how we had served him. There was no getting over it, for on his appealing to the old keeper, he of course confirmed it. It was rather a severe lesson, but it cured him completely, for he never fired at our birds again. Now, this man could give a very fair account of his game when he was by himself, but then he shot in something like the same fashion as my old friend the navy captain. The fact is, we were too quick

for him, and he somehow could not help pulling his trigger, when our guns went off, from sheer nervousness.

A gentleman I once shot with was just of the other sort; he could not kill anything when he was by himself. He was an agent over a very large estate, the proprietor of which lived abroad, and he had the entire shooting. As I was staying in his neighbourhood with a friend, whom he asked over to kill a few birds (the invitation including myself), as he had, he said, so very little time he could not go out much himself; there being plenty of birds, and sportsmen generally like breaking fresh ground, we went, although we left excellent shooting of our own. We found him dawdling over a late breakfast, and with his correspondence by his side; against the fire was his gun, put to air, I suppose. I took it up to look at it.

"Be careful," said he, with an alarmed expression; "those are the finest locks in the world. I had them taken out of a Joe Manton gun and fitted to this one; I am very particular about my guns."

I at once concluded he was a crack shot,

and we should have to do all we knew to hold our own. Breakfast over, he kept dawdling about, and did it with the utmost coolness, as if shooting was the last thing he thought of. At last we were off, and E—n, who was lame, was mounted on a cob, with a man to carry his gun. We had not got very far from the house before old "Pluto," my friend's pointer, came to a magnificent point, backed by the other dog.

"Very good indeed," said E—n. "Go on, I will wait a bit."

We walked quietly up, and bagged our two brace in good form; no tailoring or hunting after winged birds. On we went, and had capital sport; but I missed two very easy shots following, when E—n seemed to have braced himself up to the mark, for on our proceeding up to the dogs, on their coming to a point, E—n said, "Hold on a minute," got off his pony, and took his gun from the man, examined the locks carefully, and then nodded to us to go up. We walked in line, E—n in the centre; up got a magnificent covey, and down came five birds. The Squire and E—n had both killed their brace, but I had missed

my bird with the first barrel. E—n took it all as if he was thoroughly used to do the same thing, and as imperturbable as Charles Matthews in 'Cool as a Cucumber,' mounted his pony again. Not long afterwards he said, "I have so much to do, I think I shall go in; you go on, and I hope you will have good sport; and, 'Martin,' take them over all the best of the ground," and away he went.

When he departed, Martin the keeper smiled, and told us his master would never have got off his pony if I had not missed; but would now be in grand feather for a week, as he never saw him do such a thing before. He said he very seldom goes out by himself, and when he does he never kills anything; but when he goes out with other gentlemen, if he manages to knock over a bird fairly he goes home. A wise man too; as any one seeing him perform, as we did, would have said he was a crack shot.

We had a very good day, wound up with an excellent dinner, finished by the best hare I ever tasted; and I will give my readers his receipt for cooking one at the end of this chapter. He made no allusion to his shooting, not knowing the keeper had split, leaving us

to infer that it was a usual thing with him, and that if he had not been so busy he would have shown us the way to do the trick. Of course we regretted he was not with us, as he would have so greatly aided in filling the bag.

We shot remarkably well that day, barring my three misses; and I can scarcely ever remember having so few runners. Of all things I hate tailoring my birds by breaking their legs, or seeing them go away wounded; I would ten times rather miss them out and out. This is the fault of shooting too low, and to guard against this, it should be borne in mind that nineteen times out of twenty a bird is rising as he flies, except where you are above him, and he is going down-hill. But I am forgetting all about what I was saying, and going away at score. Let us haste back at once.

Well, I had my ground and my man, whose report of the prospects of what was on it, considering that it had not been looked after for some years, was very favourable. I knew Isaac would not neglect his part, for his heart was in it, and when that is the case you can rely upon a thing being well done.

Now, the next thing was to look out for a

dog. I went round to all the keepers I knew, but they had nothing to part with; there were no sporting advertising papers in those days, except 'Bell's Life,' and that was not at that time much of a sportsman's paper for getting what I wanted. The time got on to near the first of September, and I was still without a dog, when I came across a sporting farmer, who was not going to shoot that season, and would sell his dog. I went to see it, and found a good-looking, liver-coloured setter bitch, but she was very fat. The farmer said she would work all day, but this I doubted very much. However, on his assurance that she was a real good one, I bought her for a five-pound note, then considered a fair price for a sporting dog. I gave her as much work, and got her as fit as I could, in the short time I had; but when the eventful day arrived she still had a load of flesh on her.

The evening before the eventful day having arrived, Isaac came up to take his last instructions, when I informed him I had a bit of a surprise for him, and when I told him what it was, he looked uncommonly chop-fallen for a time; but when I had argued it out with

him, he fell cheerfully into my views. I thought that if he was away with me, anybody who had been in the habit of taking a sly cut in over my ground would take advantage of his absence; and I had accordingly sent for old Ben—a cunning old fellow, and a capital marker, who my old naval friend used to take out with him. Old Ben was the father of the young gentleman whom I introduced in the first chapter, and up to every move on the board.

"Isaac," said I, "do you think your little terrier would follow me?"

"No, sir, I'm sure she wouldn't; but if you take her in a string she won't leave you after the first shot is fired."

"Well," I said, "bring her up with you in the morning, and call me at five o'clock." (Dear me! was it likely I should want any calling?)

Having over-night placed gun, boots, gaiters, powder-horn, shot-belt (I believe it was really a belt carrying about three pounds), caps, and whistle all carefully laid out in my bed-room, so that there should be no hurry or hunting for anything in the morning, I retired; but

not to sleep. Such a restless night as I had has often been described, and such sleep as I got was disturbed by visions of monster coveys, impossible hares, and guns that I could not get up to my shoulder.

I rose, I was going to say, with the lark, but long ere that early songster had risen from his simple couch on the bare earth I was up and waiting for Ben and Isaac. As it began to get light, they came, almost together, Isaac bringing his white terrier. She was a handsome little wiry-haired bitch, full of mischief; but for a terrier, as well broken as ever I saw one. She would work to the slightest sound of a whistle, or the sign of her master's hand. I believe she was one of the celebrated Jack Russell's breed, as Isaac had brought her up from Devonshire when she was a very small pup when on a visit to a friend who lived near the reverend sportsman; at all events, she was a good one, and worth a whole lane full of the so-called fox-terriers so common at the present day. Handsome enough they are many of them, but—well, if their owners are satisfied so am I. Venom was so useful that I bought her of Isaac the next day, and kept her till

she was both blind and deaf. She had a wonderful nose, and once put on the scent of anything, it was as safe as if roasting before your kitchen fire; but you had to be pretty quick upon her with hare or rabbit, or she would soon tear it to pieces. Anything in the shape of vermin she would never let go of as long as there was life in it, and, as Dandie Dinmont said, would tackle "anything with a hairy skin on't." The poor old bitch got so completely worn out that a friendly charge of shot sent her, as the Indians say, to the "happy hunting grounds," where, if her spirit still lives, the rats and other vermin have but a sorry time of it.

Now, let us go on to our ground, for I am sure I have now gone off the track long enough. Ben said we must make haste, for as he came through the town he had seen old Savage and his white setter just starting. Savage was one of the largest landholders on the common, having twelve acres; but of course he went over the whole of it. He was a very old man, much troubled with the rheumatics, but a fair shot of the long rail poking stamp; but I don't think he troubled His

Majesty's exchequer by paying duty for a certificate. It was considered by the land-holders on the common that they could all kill game that chose, without it. I know, as a fact, that they paid no taxes or poor's rates for their land.

Having parted with Isaac at a point where he had to turn off to go to our own ground, though often taking a lingering and a longing look behind him, Ben and I got to our ground. It was rather a foggy morning, with a very strong dew, and it was not very long before I was wet through above the knees; and as we poked about for a long time without finding anything, I almost began to wish I had not commenced quite so early. I think it must have been nearly an hour before "Doll," after drawing some time across a piece of stubble, stood firm, and on my walking up, there rose a single bird, looking as big as a rook through the fog. I polished him off, but he was a poor, draggled-looking customer, from running about in the dew; but such as he was, an old cock, he was my first partridge, and I was duly pleased with him. On going on Doll soon began to draw nigh, and at last came to a

point, when up got the old hen and a lot of light brown looking half-grown birds. Poor old cock, I believe he, Spartan-like, nobly sacrificed himself to save his family. I flung up my gun, but was in time to save pulling the trigger, and very glad I was; they pitched close to a piece of standing corn, into which they, I have no doubt, ran.

"Why didn't you shoot?" said Ben, "that old Savage will have every one of them if he comes across them."

"Well, let him," said I, "for I won't shoot at squeakers."

"Old Savage will swear they are a small breed peculiar to the common," said Ben.

"I hope he won't find them," said I; "at all events, they are safe for the present in that piece of barley;" it being a "*Lex non scripta*" well understood, that no one should go into standing corn on the common.

On we went, but met with very little success. Doll found and stood a good many times; but as there were very many patches of late barley and beans still out, the birds found shelter there, and we had to be very careful to prevent Doll going into them, as that was an

offence in the eye of the commoners only second to going in yourself. At length it drew on towards breakfast-time (I had arranged with old Tom to meet us at a certain point with it at nine o'clock); but long before that time had come, my stomach had been crying out for it.

We were at the appointed spot before Tom, having only bagged two brace of birds; and I was not over-pleased with the commencement of my campaign, and made a mental resolution, not to go out again in the early dew. The birds are on their feed and unsettled, and you get wet through and uncomfortable. There were other miseries in store for us, but of that more anon.

At length we spied old Tom coming along, and with him a young London friend of mine; and never was breakfast more acceptable or better enjoyed.

After this was discussed, Tom having been sent off with the remains and the birds (of which he was as proud as if they had been forty brace), and with instructions to meet us at one o'clock with lunch, we made another attempt, and had not gone very far before Doll

made a capital point in a piece of potatoes. I hurried up, and instantly there rose a splendid covey of birds, only a few yards from the dog's nose. The whirring noise they made so close to me unnerved me for the moment, and off went both barrels without touching a feather. I looked rather foolish, as I was anxious to show off before my Londoner. However, Ben marked them all down into a piece of standing beans. Ben told me I had fired too quickly, which I was well aware of; and I don't think I was the first tyro by a good many who has been startled (although expecting them) by the sudden noise and whirr of a covey of partridges.

"Now," said Ben, "let us take up the setter and put the little terrier," which he was leading by a string, "into the beans; she can't do much harm, and if you take it steady you will kill every one of them."

Down we went, and the little bitch had not been in a minute before three birds rose, and I killed a brace, right and left, in good form. I was proceeding to load in a great hurry. "Take it steady," said Ben; but, for the life of me, take it steady I could not, for the birds kept rising in ones and twos, and by the time

I was ready they were all gone but one, which I hit very hard. "He'll tower," said Ben; and so he did, and fell, as they always do, stone dead and on his back.

The birds were now well scattered. Ben had marked them all down, and I ought to have killed every one of them; but the excitement was a little too much for me; and I will make a clean breast of it, and admit at once that I bungled most fearfully. I crippled two birds, which we got with the help of the terrier, who squeezed one of them so hard as to expose what he had been having for breakfast, and only killed one bird clean and well. Doll behaved admirably, but was beginning to show signs of her condition, or rather, the want of it. She soon after began to confine her pace to a trot, and ended by coming to heel. "Hold up, Doll," only succeeded in getting her to start off for a few yards, when she came back again. She had done her best, but Nature cried "Enough. Take her up, Ben, and let her have a rest." My London friend most good-naturedly offered to lead her, and we determined to let the terrier loose, and do the best we could with her.

The day had become very hot, and poor Doll appeared to suffer very much from want of water, and we could find none. My Londoner said he thought the birds seemed very easy to hit (they always do to a looker-on), when I asked him to have a shot, but he declined. Not long after, while he was walking about leading the dog, quietly smoking his pipe, and I dare say thinking there was not much fun in partridge shooting, we saw him standing with the dog making a point almost between his legs, while he was frantically gesticulating with his hat. I went up, when a landrail rose from just under the dog's nose, which I bagged; indeed, I don't see how I could have helped it, it flew so slow. My friend was highly pleased, and I think the bagging this time gave him more satisfaction than all the rest. We then met Tom with the luncheon, and were glad enough to have an hour's rest; and he, being one of the landholders of the common, knew where there was a pond of water, so he was despatched for a little, which greatly refreshed the poor dogs; and when we commenced work again Doll went off very fresh, but she was foot-sore, and

had to give up. Her will was good enough, I believe, but Tom having stopped to help take home the game, I sent him off home with it and Doll. I got six or seven more shots, and killed four and a rabbit, but missed a hare most scandalously, which jumped up from under my feet. The sun was getting near the horizon, and I, having had enough of it, willingly adopted my old honest friend's rule, viz. to leave off shooting before sunset, though about that time birds very often come out of their hiding-places after being driven about from pillar to post, and I have known a great many birds killed in a very short time; but it is most unsportsmanlike, as birds are wanting to go on their feed. As it was I did not reach home until nearly seven o'clock, having nearly four miles to walk to finish up with, having been out fourteen hours. Bag—seven brace of birds, a landrail, and a rabbit. Not much of a bag, and I dare say a good shot would easily have doubled it; but it was not so very bad for a first attempt; at all events, on reflection, I was very well satisfied, as I could not be expected to shoot like an old hand at it.

When Isaac came up after dinner, he said he was glad he had gone to our own ground, as several people who had been in the habit of taking a sly cut in there (not that the owner allowed it, but farmers are generally so busy at that time of year that they cannot pay attention to such minor affairs), knowing I was gone to the common, thought they would be all right. Isaac told me old Savage had been obliged to give up on account of the heat and his rheumatism, and had come home in the middle of the day. I told Isaac to go down and see if he could make an exchange with the old fellow for his setter. He went, but reported that he would not have my dog at any price, his old Sancho (which was a bitch) was worth a cart-load of such dogs; but as he was afraid he should have to give it up altogether, he would sell his dog. But he would not take a penny less than three pounds for her. I dare say he thought it a large price. I very quickly sent Isaac with the money, and he brought the dog back with him, at which I was much pleased, as I knew perfectly well that it would in all probability confirm Mr. Savage in his intention. Sancho (I retained the name)

turned out a very useful animal, she had a capital nose, and would stand as firm as a rock as long as the birds stopped quiet; but if they attempted to move, in she went like a shot, and if they were not very quickly on the wing she would very often nail one. I kept her for that season, but getting tired of her pot hunting propensities, and wanting something a little better educated, I gave her away to my sister as a house dog. She was a good-looking white bitch, with a black patch over the eye, and was long and low, very much the stamp of the present Laverack Setter. I should have bred from her if I had been certain of her breed, but I did not know either her father or grandfather; and I thought of Somerville's advice—

> "Consider well
> His lineage, what his fathers did of old,"

and consequently refrained from doing so. So ended my first of September, and I need scarcely say, that after the fatigues of a fourteen hours' tramp I slept, notwithstanding the excitement, the sleep of a most terribly tired but very fairly satisfied young sportsman.

## RECIPE FOR COOKING A HARE.

First catch your hare, as Mrs. Glasse says, but don't follow her advice further by skinning it, get some scalding hot water and dip your hare in it several times, until you find the fur will come off readily with the finger and thumb, then paunch and stuff in the usual way. After being trussed ready for the spit, get a small tin funnel with a long neck and put down the throat (it will spoil the set of the head for the table, but never mind that); when the hare is about three parts done pour into the funnel a glass of port wine, and if that is taken up by the stuffing, another. The hare should of course be thoroughly well dredged with flour and basted with fresh butter and milk. The juices of the hare are preserved, and it will not be dry, as a hare cooked in the ordinary way usually is.

## CHAPTER V.

### TWO BIG PIKE.

"Arcades ambo."

One morning in the beginning of October the post brought me the following letter:

"*Tarlton Park.*

"Dear J—,

"I am going over to Siston Pond on Thursday to fish for jack; there are plenty of fish, and Abia has caught a splendid lot of gudgeon and dace this afternoon for bait, so come over early to breakfast, and bring your old fisherman if you can, and I will drive you over. I think we shall have a good day.

"Yours ever,

"W. H. E."

Accordingly, the early morning of that day, which was rather foggy, found me in the dog-cart with my rods and tackle, and old Robert, my old fisherman, by my side. He was the town postman, who had found some one to take his delivery for the day. As Robert had

only two deliveries a day, at eight o'clock in the morning and four in the afternoon, he had plenty of spare time to exercise his favourite amusement of fishing. He was a tall, spare, upright, keen-looking man, bordering on sixty years of age, and as silent as the grave; when he did speak, it was usually in a sup pressed tone of voice, a little above a whisper, as if he was afraid even at that distance he might alarm the fish, so much had it become his habit to use excessive caution when dealing with the finny tribe. Robert had two very desirable qualifications for a fisherman—patience and perseverance.

Robert, although very fond of the rod, particularly delighted in set hooks and trimmers, as he said, and truly too, they took all the big fish, but it has a semi-poaching cut about it to be exactly according to my taste; but with such a fresh-water shark as the pike, I am not very particular as to how I kill him. I noticed that Robert had put rather a bulky-looking flask basket into the trap, and though I knew pretty well what it contained, I asked him what he had got there? "Only a few trimmers," said Robert. "I thought perhaps if we did not get on well with the rods,

the squire might like to try a bit of live baiting." But I knew perfectly well that Robert had set his heart upon these said trimmers being the leading article.

Arrived at the lodge gates, which I found already opened for me, I quickly drove up the fine old avenue, and found the squire, as I expected, all impatience, waiting for me at the hall door.

"Come, Jack, make haste! breakfast has been waiting this half-hour, and we ought to have started by this time." It was barely eight o'clock then, but he was always very fidgety to get off when there was any fishing or shooting to be done. The ladies of the family were not yet down, so we made short work of what old Jorrocks calls a knife and fork breakfast, that is to say, it was substantial. We were soon in the squire's wagonette, with his keeper Abia (corrupted into Bia, as he was always called) to manage the punt. I was not sorry to see a good-sized hamper, which seemed to require a goodish bit of lifting, put in by the latter, and away we started, having about eight miles to drive. I offered the squire a cigar, which he declined, but he pulled out, filled, and lighted a genuine

Killarney nearly as black as a coal, while I lighted my cigar (I was not equal to a pipe in those days) as we were going comfortably along.

I may as well give the reader an introduction to the squire. He was about forty-five years of age, with a fine, healthy, fresh complexion, such as only a man leading a regular life, and spending most of his time in the open air, can have; a very cheerful, handsome face, slightly embrowned by the sun; about four feet nine in height, stoutly made, but not corpulent; altogether a good specimen of a country gentleman, but wearing a moustache (which was unusual at that time, except amongst military men), which he wore by virtue of being a major in the local troop of yeomanry cavalry; and he was uncommonly fond of telling the following story connected with it. His serjeant, when the troop met one day assembled for drill, began exercising the men (previously to the arrival of the serjeant-major) in the sword exercise, and gave the following words of command, which I give just as the words are pronounced in the broad dialect: "When I says draa, you bean't to draa; but when I say soords, out wi'un" (pronounced ween).

He was one of a sort fast dying out, who very rarely left home, except to visit his other estates in another part of the country (where I shot with him for many years afterwards); but lived chiefly on his own fine property, paying attention to the cultivation of his coverts and timber, and such-like amusements incidental to the life of a country gentleman.

Our characteristic anecdote of his is well deserving of mention. He was often amongst his men when they were at work, throwing or cutting timber, quarrying, etc., or if any building was going on he was sure to be with them, and as he was not an idle man, he as often as not took a hatchet or hammer and helped in the work. Now, the squire was devoted to the gun and the fishing-rod, but was no fox-hunter, indeed, he rarely ever got across a horse; but he preserved foxes most strictly, and his coverts were generally a sure find. On one occasion, the hounds having found a fox in the home covert, the squire was standing on the park wall watching them going away when some would-be swell, in a bit of pink, no doubt a stranger to the country, seeing him with a woodman's axe on his

shoulder, called out, "Whose place is this, my good man?" "It belongs to your humble servant, and if you like to go up to the house I dare say you can get a glass of sherry." The diminished swell mumbled some almost unintelligible apology, and took himself off as fast as he could go.

We duly arrived at the pond, and having put up our horse at a neighbouring farm-house, we carried our impedimenta down to the boat-house and embarked. The fog had cleared off, leaving one of those fine, still days without much sun, what I call a brown-looking day, we so frequently get in October —the month I like best of any in the year.

The pond was about half-a-mile long, by from two to three hundred yards wide, and looked all over like pike-fishing. We did not lose sight of the hamper, but took it with us into the punt. The punt was a very roomy one, which there was no fear of upsetting, flat-bottomed, and with very little appreciable difference between the stem and stern; in fact, a regular fishing-punt. Bia is told off to the anything but pleasing duty of pulling her; and after having prepared half-a-

dozen good-sized dace on gorge hooks, we were about to start, when I observed that Robert had something on his mind, for he kept on looking first at the squire and then at me, when at last I said, "What is it, Robert? out with it."

"Hadn't us better put out a few trimmers, sir?"

We could not help laughing, but it was said in Robert's quietest and most insinuating tone, and as we knew the owner of the pond wanted to destroy the jack (as he was going to try the experiment of stocking it with trout), we could not resist, and let the old man have his way. He used gudgeon for his trimmers, as they were tougher, and lived longer on the hook, and, as he said, played better than the dace—play, indeed! it must be a very fine game of play, impaled upon a hook with a prospect of being immediately devoured alive.

In case any of my readers should not know what a trimmer is, I may as well explain it. The trimmer consists of a round piece of cork about an inch thick and six inches in diameter; a piece of wood about four inches long is put through the centre; the cork is usually painted red on the under side and white on the top; a line of whip-cord from ten to fifteen yards is

then wound round the projecting part of the wood on the white side, leaving a yard to two or three, according to the depth of the water, and to your fancy as to how deep you will fish, hanging loose; the line is then fixed at the point you wish by putting it into a slit cut in the cork. To this end of the line is fastened the piece of gimp or twisted wire with double hooks, the poor fish which you use as bait having been first made fast to it. This is usually done by making a couple of slits in the skin of its back near the fin, the slits being about half an inch to an inch apart, according to the size of the bait, and passing the gimp or wire in at one slit and out at the other; this is of course done with the living bait. Poor little wretch! no wonder he makes constant and frantic efforts to escape, or plays, as Robert called it. I always disliked live baiting on account of its cruelty, *but it is very deadly;* and, as Isaac Walton says, "you should handle your bait gently, and as if you loved him."

Having fixed your bait as quickly as possible, put it in the water (it has taken some time to describe, but the whole operation can be done in a few seconds) in the likeliest places

you can find—deep water bordering on the weeds for choice. You can see at a glance whether a fish has taken or not, according as your red or white signal is uppermost.

While Robert was setting up his trimmers, and I sat on the bank, the squire took a turn along it, and I very soon heard him singing out. I ran up with the landing-net; he had a run, and after a time I put the net under a pretty little fish of about three pounds.

By this time Robert was back with the punt, and we moved off. We pulled up to the further end of the pond, but here, after getting one small fish of about two pounds (we should have put him in again had not our orders been to destroy, as he was not injured by the hooks), we found the water shallow, and too many weeds still standing, so we came back again into deeper water, had a few casts, but got no run, when we decided to go still lower down; we then came upon one of Robert's trimmers, which had got some distance from where he put it, showing the white flag of defeat. Robert's eyes glistened, and we hauled into the punt a very pretty fish of about four pounds, and not being much injured, we put him into

the well of the punt, which was three parts full of water, and proceeded on our voyage; when all at once we heard a terrible splash and commotion in the well, saw a flash of something shiny white, a flap on the seat, and it was some seconds before we realized the fact that Robert's fish was gone. There was a hole about six inches square in the cover of the well, through which the fish had jumped and disappeared. Robert's face (always a long one) assumed still longer proportions; he could not believe his eyes; he looked in the punt, he looked in the water, but the fish was clean gone and no mistake. Robert at length looked up, and in a louder and more excited tone than I ever heard him issue from his lips before, exclaimed, "Hadn't us better go back and look arter'n, sir." I said, "If it was a turnpike road we might, but as it is about fourteen feet of water instead, I do not fancy it will be of much use."

Robert lost his voice altogether, and entirely collapsed for some time, but he was brought to life again in this way. I had as yet caught nothing; I had had one run, but the fish after carrying the bait some distance left it. I was lazily letting my bait sink to the bottom to

see how deep it was, when, as I was just drawing it up again, I felt something; and after carefully feeling it, with my finger and thumb on the line as gently as if I was handling a silk thread, but bearing that in mind, still as firmly as I dared, I felt a most decided tug and a shake. "By Jove, squire, I've got him!"

"Well done!" says the squire, "give him time;" and out comes his watch. "Give him ten minutes." But before that time had expired, I found my captive steadily sailing away. "All right now," says the squire, "he has pouched it" (as it is called) "where he took it. Strike him now;" and I struck him by giving a smart upward turn of the wrist. He shook his head, and took out about forty yards of line; but I kept a pretty firm pressure on him, and grudged him every yard he took. At length he made a turn, and came back pretty close to us, when I wound up as quickly as I could; he still kept close to the bottom, and away he went again as vigorous as ever. When he made the next turn he began to come nearer the surface, and as he passed us about fifteen yards off, we caught sight of him—a

goodly fish, which we put at twenty pounds at the least; he saw us too, and went below again, but soon began to show symptoms of caving in, and after about a quarter of an hour he came alongside the boat. One short turn more and he turned on his side, when Robert very quickly put his finger and thumb into the hollows of his eyes, and with one vigorous heave hauled him into the boat; a smart rap on his head, a strong quiver, a gasp or two, a sort of straightening himself out, and he was a dead fish. I was warmly congratulated on my capture, and after duly admiring him, we drank a libation of whiskey to the god of fishes, and proceeded to work again.

Not very far from where I had first hooked my fish the squire suddenly exclaimed, "Here he is! I'm in him!" The fish immediately made straight for a bed of water-lilies to pouch the bait, but there was considerable danger of his getting the line tangled in them, and we were anxious accordingly. But when the allotted ten minutes had expired the squire struck. "By Jingo, he's on;" and out he came into the deep water, and straight under the boat, before we had time to get out of the way.

The squire had to let out plenty of slack, and then get it up the other side of the punt, all which time the squire was smoking his pipe and shouting and hollowing at Bia to pull this way, and then that, to back, to stop, to go, and fifty other directions. At last the fish made a turn, and bolted away for the water-lilies again. "I shall lose him now," said the squire; "pull up to him, Bia." When we got up, sure enough he had got the line well tangled in the stems of the lilies. "Pull, Bia, back water, Bia; why the devil don't you do as I tell you?" We got the boat-hook to work, and pulled up the roots, and were glad to find he was still on. He was too well hooked to be able to get off by such a manœuvre; that is the beauty of the gorge, for the pike generally gets it so far down his stomach that unless the tackle gives way his doom is pretty certain.

In the excitement of this last business the squire had taken his pipe out of his mouth and clapped it into his pocket. This was the pike's last effort, and he was very soon hauled into the boat in the same way as the last; he was about as big a fish, rather longer, but not so deep. The squire was standing up in the

boat, his face beaming with delight, and with his hat off, mopping his face after the exertion and excitement, when, sniff, "What is that burning?" sniff, "By Jove! I'm on fire." The smoke was coming out of his pocket. To whip his coat off was the work of a moment. "Dip it in the water," exclaimed some one, and dipped it was. When he felt in the pocket he pulled out his handkerchief full of holes, but the pipe was gone. "Confound it," said the squire; "I wish the fish was at the bottom of the pond; I wouldn't have lost that pipe for anything." However, it was of no use grumbling; he had got the fish, and the pipe was gone.

We then decided to pull in to shore and have our lunch, which we thought we had well earned. On turning out the basket we found a good-sized beef-steak pie, a very small cheese, which one of the squire's tenants used to make for him on purpose for shooting and fishing luncheons, a good home-baked loaf, half-a-dozen bottles of Bass', besides the bottle of whiskey which we had already tapped. Having done ample justice to the lunch, and topped up with a glass of whiskey all round, I lighted a cigar, and again offered the squire

one, which this time he took, but with a very disconsolate air, when a lucky thought struck him. "Bia, go up to the farm and bring my great-coat, this one is not very comfortable, and see if you can find a pipe that has been smoked."

Robert said he would go and examine his trimmers.

"Robert," said I, "while you are out you had better go and look after that jack."

Robert turned on his heel, looking terribly disgusted. While they are gone on their respective missions we, "*Recusans sub tegmine fagi*," enjoy our baccy, at least I did, for although the squire said the cigar was a very good one (I prided myself on their being a particularly choice brand of Cabañas), he kept on lamenting the loss of his pipe. We of course had all the incidents of our two fish over again, and buttered each other most plentifully no doubt.

In due time Bia arrived with the coat and a venerable churchwarden, which the squire broke off to his liking, and having filled and lighted, looked comparatively happy.

Robert then arrived with a pike of about six

or seven pounds, and a splendid perch of over two pounds. We hung the squire's jacket out to dry and got aboard again. We had a very fine afternoon, bringing to book five more fish, the biggest of which, however, did not make more than seven pounds, and with two more on the trimmers, wound up the day. On getting to the farm we weighed our fish, which amounted to nearly ninety pounds, my fish turning the scale at eighteen and a half pounds, and the squire's not quite eighteen; and having left a due share with the farmer, for whoever cared to eat them (I don't; they are dry and insipid to my fancy; the only jack I ever caught worth eating were in Windermere), we packed up our traps and departed, highly delighted with ourselves and our day.

Not long afterwards the pond was emptied, and we went over with our nets when the water was about half out, and the fish had all got down into deep water, and a glorious catch we had of pike, perch, tench, and carp. One of the latter, which I pulled out with an eel spear, weighed over fifteen pounds; and we took lots of large tench home alive to stock our own waters. Mine I never saw again, as they were

carried down by the stream the first flood that came.

The pond was duly emptied, and the mud dug out to a considerable depth, when they thought they had effectually cleared it of the jack. The pond was left dry for some time, the small stream by which it was fed being turned in another direction, and when it was allowed to fill again, a great many young trout were turned in; but I am sorry to say that in a few years the jack appeared again (how or in what manner I must leave others more learned in the matter to determine, I only state the fact), and with them the trout disappeared: thus showing how difficult it is to convert water natural to the pike into a trout lake.

Having safely arrived at the park, and made an equal division of the spoil, we drank an extra glass of the old Highland malt (whilst my trap was being got ready), and success to our next attack on the pike. The best friends must part, and I succeeded in getting out without a second edition of the old Highland. "Good night, squire;" "good night, Jack;" and up I got. Poor Robert's turn for being chaffed about his fish was not yet done.

"Robert," says the squire.

"Yes, sir."

"The next time you put a fish in the well mind and put a trimmer over the hole."

Robert was quiet for a moment.

"Good night, sir. I hope the next time you get your fish in the weeds you won't put your lighted pipe in your pocket." One for Robert.

Away we went, but had not gone many yards before I heard the squire singing out, and pulled up.

"Come over to-morrow, and we will try the outlying spinneys and hedgerows for a pheasant or two, and stay to dinner."

"All right, I'll come."

As I drive home I say to Robert, "Would you rather have a crown or the big fish?"

"You don't mean to part with the fish, sir?"

"I am not going to keep it."

"Well, if that is the case, I'll have the fish, and proud my missus will be of him."

I dare say Robert reckoned it as eighteen pounds of fish, at, say, fourpence a pound, that is six shillings. I reckoned him at about sixpence, so I went to bed congratulating myself that I had pleased Robert, got rid of

a thing I did not want (what is called a British compliment), and saved my five shillings. As Robert was walking off with his fish, which he did by putting a piece of cord through one jaw and carrying it over his back, not a little proud of his burthen, I suggested to him that it would be as well to make sure of him and put one of the trimmers into his mouth.

"You may depend upon it, sir," said Robert, "no jack will ever get away from me like that again."

I need scarcely add, I went over to the park the next morning, and a very pleasant day we had—one amongst the very many which I had with one of the best shots and most genial companions it has been my lot to meet. Alas! he was some years since gathered to his fathers, and as I think of the past I heave a deep sigh, and exclaim with the poet,

> "Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still."

*Requiescat in pace.*

## CHAPTER VI.

### MY FIRST WOODCOCK.

"About forty years ago,
The sad time I well remember,
'Twas on a drear and murky night
In the dark month of November."—OLD SONG.

On such a night as the above, in the year 184—, a friend and I started off to drive to Gloucester, in order to catch a mail coach which started from there for South Wales very early in the morning. We had seen an advertisement in the 'Times,' addressed to "sportsmen and lovers of wild shooting," in which the proprietor of a certain hotel, not one hundred miles from Builth, offered shooting (free to persons staying at his hotel) over a large extent of rough, wild country, having a sprinkling of game of all kinds, including plenty of snipe and woodcock. I

had killed a fair lot of snipe, but never a woodcock, indeed, I do not think I had ever seen one on the wing; but I had often longed for a shot at that glorious bird, and my ambition was fired by the advertisement in question; and having made due inquiries by letter, a very tempting programme was held out to us, and away we went. My friend Fisher was only a few years older than myself, equally fond of the gun; but he had also never killed a cock. We took down with us a brace of spaniels, one was a liver and white mottled bitch called Fan, a very steady, hard-working animal, the other was a black and tan dog of very large size, as big and heavy as a Clumber (one of a breed then celebrated at Berkeley Castle); but from that time to this I have never seen the like of him. He was an extremely handsome dog, and would have made a little fortune on the show bench, now dog shows are so much in vogue.

I think it was about five o'clock in the morning when we left Gloucester, and were the only passengers on the outside of the coach; it was a beastly foggy morning, with a most uncomfortable drizzle falling. The

guard's bugle, however, was cheery as we passed through the different villages and small towns, but both he and the coachman were far from agreeable; whether it was too early in the morning to begin to talk, or whether they thought two such young fellows were not good for much in the way of tipping, or of "a drain," I don't know, but they seemed to treat us with silent contempt. It is a very different thing travelling with such sporting paraphernalia as we had, in these days, when I know from experience that the possession of a gun, a fishing-rod, or a dog is a sure passport to the civility and attention of railway guards and porters.

There was nothing worthy of note, except the very speedy changing of horses at the different stages (I always fancy it must have been a point of honour amongst the helpers as to who could put to the quickest), until we got to Monmouth, when the guard announced that half-an-hour was allowed for breakfast; and very glad we were to take off our great-coats and get before a roaring fire. The breakfast things were on the table, with part of a ham and a cold fowl, but relying on the

assurance of the waiter, that there was something hot coming, we continued to warm ourselves; but as it did not make its appearance very speedily, we rang the bell and inquired, and were met by the waiter's "Coming directly, sir."

Another ten minutes went by, when we rung again. After a time the something hot made its appearance in the shape of a tea-pot, but the tea was so scalding hot we could not drink it; at that moment the guard put his head into the room, and said the coach was ready. We rang violently for the waiter, who was some time making his appearance, and when he did it was without the something hot, but with "Coming directly, sir."

The guard again put in his head with the positive assurance that the coach "can't wait any longer."

Waiter again with the bill—"two-and-sixpence each for breakfast."

We stormed and raved, but it was of no use, and we had to pay for a cup of scalding water. I whispered to my friend, and he collared a loaf and I the cold fowl, and in spite of the remonstrances of the waiter we carried it off, and ultimately devoured it on the top

of the coach; it was rather dry and without salt, but we enjoyed it nevertheless, and only regretted we had not carried off the ham as well.

The coach passed within fourteen miles of our destination, and we hired an old shandy dan, called a fly, to take us on. We arrived at last, and found a very large old inn, about half furnished, but the room we were ushered into looked comfortable enough, barring a freshly-lighted fire and a rather smoky fire-place; however, we ordered our dinner, anticipating which they had got ready a small leg of Welsh mutton, to which I need scarcely say we did ample justice. The fire by this time had burnt brightly up, so we hauled up a large old-fashioned sofa in front of the fire and made ourselves comfortable; and having ordered a bottle of port, we asked the landlord to join us, and to talk over the prospect of sport for the morrow. He was a decent, genial sort of fellow, and entered heart and soul into our plans and our port.

"Anybody else staying here?" I inquired.

"Well, yes, there is a gentleman from Bath, who comes every year."

My spirits went down to zero. No doubt

he had been all over the ground, killed all the cocks, and had the cream of the thing, and so expressed myself.

"You need not take much trouble about him," said the landlord; "he is rather a feeble old gentleman, does not go out till late in the day, and if he can kill a snipe he is perfectly satisfied; he dines upon it, and his dog has the bones."

This I thought was a crammer, as sporting dogs will not as a rule eat snipe or woodcock bones, or, except very rarely, bones of game at all. But when I saw the gentleman and his dog the next day, they were so lean I might well have believed it. Fisher then inquired who could go with us to show us the ground and carry the bag; he said as he was not busy he would, if agreeable, himself accompany us on the morrow, and that there was a man in the village named Lewis, a capital beater, who knew the ground thoroughly, and who always went out with gentlemen who came for the shooting.

"The very thing! send for Lewis at once;" which he accordingly did.

When Lewis made his appearance, I thought

a more unlikely-looking customer for the job I never saw. In height he was about five feet nine, thin, with high cheek-bones and small mutton-chop whiskers; his dress consisted of a blue tail-coat with brass buttons, shortish trousers, low shoes, and dark grey or black stockings; and all the time I knew Lewis I never saw him in any other costume. Come home as late at night as we might, and drenched to the skin, there was Lewis the next morning clean and fresh in the very same garments. He was a tailor by trade, but dearly loved sport, and whenever he could get a chance to go out as beater the tailoring might go to old Nick. Lewis said he could show us plenty of cocks, and having arranged terms with him, we gave him a parting glass and dismissed him for the night, arranging to start by nine o'clock the following morning. We were greatly impressed with Lewis's report and confidence, and went to bed to dream of woodcocks accordingly.

We were up early enough, the reader may rely, made a good breakfast, and sallied forth; but what was our surprise to find two stout hill ponies in charge of a boy, a brace of

rough Welsh greyhounds, a goodish-looking blue ticked setter, and our two spaniels. I had forgotten to say that directly we got there a small, nondescript-looking little dog came into the room and at once made friends with us, and never left us all the time we were there. It was nearly white, covered with small crisp curls, in shape and appearance like a very small hound, in fact, it was a cross between a French poodle and a French basset hound—a rum-looking object to go out shooting with, but I never saw a better little dog; his nose was wonderful, and he was a most indefatigable worker; but he used to get so thoroughly done up that we had frequently to carry him home, where, after being fed, he would curl up on the sofa and remain there all night; but he was ready again the next morning. There is nothing like fire for a spaniel, or indeed any dog, after a hard day's work in the wet. I have always adopted this plan with my spaniels, and have found the benefit of it.

It is time I returned to the front of the house. I protested strongly against taking the greyhounds, it looked so unsportsmanlike and pot-hunting. Whoever heard of guns and

greyhounds together! But it was explained to me that, as we had to go over the mountain to get to our ground, we might very likely get a course or two on our road, and that the greyhounds might then come back with the boy and ponies. We then consented, and away we started for Cwm Dwr.

On our road we had three courses, the little dark Welsh horses going up-hill like the wind. However, the dogs were good, and we succeeded in killing a brace, which we sent back by the boy, and ordered one to be cooked for dinner. We then set to work after the cock, Lewis diving into every hole and corner, and poking away with a short thick stick he always carried, and with his cheery cry of Hi cock, cock, cock, or, as he pronounced it, co. We were beating a thick piece of fir plantation, when all at once the little Frenchman gave tongue.

I heard a flap of a wing (how well-known to me now is that never-to-be-mistaken peculiar flap which a woodcock always makes on rising from the ground). Lewis sung out, "Mark cock." I saw something brown through the fir-trees and instantly let drive, when down it came.

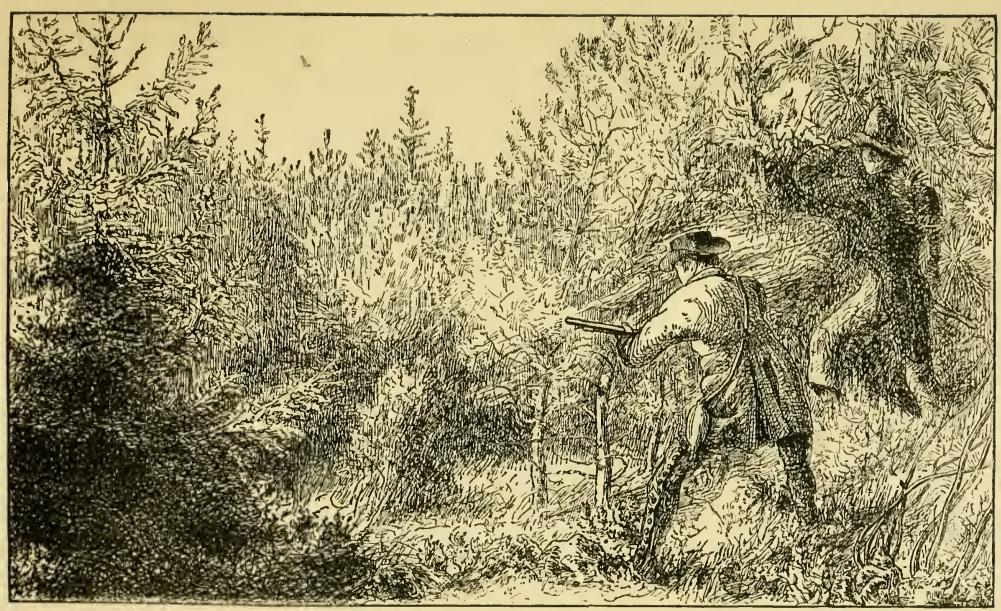
"Well done!" said Lewis, "a regular cock

shot;" but I am quite sure it was more by accident than design, or more by good luck than anything else.

I ran up, and there, as dead as a stone, was my first "cock," and a grand bird he was, being the biggest I have ever seen. We did not weigh him for several days after, when he turned the scale at seventeen ounces, which I fancy is a very unusual weight. I have since killed hundreds of couples, and never approached the weight of this bird.

Not long afterwards, in passing through a small plantation of tall, scrubby old firs, we caught sight of a brown bird sailing away at some distance; somebody sang out, "Mark cock," but it pitched in a tree. We went up, and Fisher knocked it down; it was a brown owl.

This reminds me of an anecdote of another owl. When I was shooting in that first-rate sporting county, Shropshire, some years afterwards, a boy named Bill Price came up from his work one evening and said to the farmer, at whose house I was staying, in a great state of excitement, "Maister! maister! I bin and marked down a woodcock, and he's pitched in a



"Well done!" said Lewis, "a regular cock-shot." P. 109.

tree, and ha got a feace like a caat." The story got abroad, and the boy got well chaffed for it; and whenever an owl is seen in those parts they call it "Bill Price's woodcock."

There is another original story of an owl, which is too good to be lost; but this is not a Shropshire, it is one of a Wiltshire moonraker this time. A boy coming home from crow-keeping one evening, with his gun over his shoulder, just when it was getting dusk, saw something sitting on a gate-post. After looking at it for some time, he saw it move, and made it out to be a bird of some kind, so he let drive, and down it tumbled. He ran up to pick up his prize, but recoiled in horror when he saw some unknown creature lying on its back, making frightful gasps, and feebly struggling with its hairy claws. Away he ran home with all his might, almost tumbling down with fear. "Father, do go up and see what 'tis at old Robin's gate; I believe I bin and shot a cherubim." His father, after some hesitation, and rather in fear and trembling, went and brought home the dead body of a white owl.

One other owl story and I have done, or I fancy my readers will be bowling at me. I got

an owl scare myself once. I was staying with a party of friends at the very farm-house mentioned above, but my sleeping quarters were at another farm-house, about a mile and a half off; and one evening, having prolonged our usual game at whist until a later hour than usual, I took up my stick and started. It was a very dark night, and after I had blundered across a large field as well as I could (fortunately I knew every inch of the road), I was just opening a gate to enter into a narrow lane called the Holloway, being cut out of the sandstone rock, when a frightful hissing saluted my ears. I knew that my friends were too comfortably settled to come out and play me any practical joke, even if they had had time to get there. What could it be? I stood perfectly quiet, and the sounds ceased; the moment I moved they began again, worse than ever. Could I have got into a nest of snakes? I am not a nervous man, in fact, I flatter myself those delicate members are about as strong as most people's; but if anybody's hair stood on end mine did. After debating some time, I could not make it out and went on. There was a foot-plank over a watercourse to

cross in taking a short cut, which I usually did, and there I met old John the keeper, who had come out to look for me, fearing something had happened, as I was long after my usual time. On mentioning my fright to him he could not help laughing, and told me there was a nest of young owls in an old pollard oak to which the gate was hung. I fancy, from the noise they made, father, mother, and children must have all joined in resisting my untimely visit to the vicinity of their mansion.

I have made a long digression, and it is quite time I got back to our cock-shooting. Lewis seemed to know intuitively where to find them, and beat his ground thoroughly. He never spared himself, and poked his stick into every hole and corner. There is nothing like beating every inch of your ground, as cocks will lie very close at times, whilst at others they are off at the first alarm. I recollect Lewis saying he felt certain there must be a cock lying in one most difficult place to get at. It was under a kind of waterfall surrounded by holly bushes; we shouted and beat the bushes all round, but nothing came of it. Lewis was not to be beaten, and after great

difficulty got into the place, when he was rewarded by instantly flushing a brace of cocks, one of which we got, and marked the other down into a small dingle about one hundred yards off. We were soon after him, when up got three cocks all at once. Fisher killed one, and I got a shot right and left. My first bird went away hard hit, and we soon after picked him up; the second I missed clean. I fancied I saw some feathers fly, but on going up to the spot, found that I had cut off a branch of a young tree, which no doubt prevented the shot taking effect.

As an instance of close lying of the woodcock at times, I will relate an occurrence which happened in my early experience. I was trying a small covert for woodcock with a brace of very small young spaniels that I was breaking, and of which I am particularly fond, as when you get them broken, how much better they work for you than any one else, and how much more pleasure there is in shooting over them, when one of them found something in a small, bushy piece of thorns and long grass, about two yards in diameter. After some considerable time the little fellow put out a rabbit, which I bowled

over; he then came back again to the bush and gave tokens that there was something else there, but he did not know how to get it out. After kicking and beating about the bush for some time I got a stick and poked into it, when out came a cock, which I killed.

We then went off to a snipe-bog, but only found a few birds in it. However, we got a leash, and marked down four teal, which came from no one knew where, they went by us at such a pace; and we were not ready for them, so that we did not get a shot. But teal have a convenient habit of not going very far, so having walked up to the place where we had marked them down, they got up rather wild; but we got a brace, and after marking the others down several times, and putting them up without getting a shot, the ground we were on being very difficult walking, as we had to jump from tussock to tussock to avoid being bogged; but I suppose they got tired, for at last they lay like stones, and we managed to overhaul them both. A principle I have always adopted is, when I have once flushed game, to follow it up as long as there is a chance to account for it, instead of beating for fresh game.

We then went back to our cock-shooting, and found lots of birds, but missed them frightfully, only killing one out of seven or eight shots. It then came on to rain in such torrents that we were soon drenched to the skin; everything got so soaked that our guns would not go off—we had muzzle-loaders in those days. I shot with a gun by Lang, and my friend one by Westley Richards, and excellent guns they of course were; but such torrents as we had no muzzle-loader was proof against, though I have never found a breach-loader to miss fire from that cause.

The day was getting on, and we had nearly six miles to walk; and having taken a drop all round of a private whiskey still, which Davies the landlord had kept in reserve, and well it went surely, we counted our bag: three couple of cocks, two couple of snipe, four teal, several rabbits, the two hares which we had sent home, and the owl. We made the best of our way back; but it was almost night when we got there, and were delighted to find comfortable fires in our bed-rooms, and foot-pans with hot water for our feet, which was highly necessary after the boggy ground we had been in.

Having seen the dogs put into some clean straw, we told Lewis to come up and have his dinner; but he said he would rather have a bit of something and go home for good than come up afterwards. I rather fancy, after having his supper the poor fellow had to go to bed for his wife to get his clothes ready for the next day.

We made ourselves extremely comfortable that evening. It is certainly almost worth while getting wet to enjoy the luxury of a dry suit of tweed or flannel; and if we did not enjoy our coursed hare that evening may I never see another.

After dinner we had in our spaniels, and of course talked over the events of the day, and could not but come to the conclusion that, with fair shooting, we ought at least to have killed double the number of cocks, as we had seen more than twenty; but then the reader must remember that we were only young hands at it, and that we were in consequence not over steady. But even taking old and experienced sportsmen, you will find that more woodcocks are missed than any other description of game, the reason being, that people are always in such a hurry, and so anxious, directly the cry of

"mark cock" is heard, that they do not give themselves time; for the woodcock is, after all, very often anything but a difficult bird to kill though it is true he is a very erratic bird in his flight, sometimes sailing along like a veritable owl, at another you just catch a glimpse of him, and he has put some bush or tree between you and him like lightning; or sometimes, when he appears to have made up his mind to go at least a mile, he drops suddenly down in some most unlikely spot.

A good marker in woodcock shooting is everything, and he must not conclude because he saw him very near the ground up to a certain point, that there, or thereabouts, you will find him; for very often when he appears to drop he just gives his wing a flap and goes off to the right or left, or very often turns back, so as to deceive any but an experienced marker.

I have always made it a rule when cock-shooting in covert, when you cannot make out birds which you fancy you have marked down and cannot find, to go myself outside the covert and beat the ditch outside, and send some to do the same inside the covert, by

which means I have bagged scores of birds, which in all probability we should never have seen again, for the woodcock is here to-day and gone to-morrow. I fancy some of my readers exclaiming, "Do tell me where this 'El dorado' is to be found;" but they must wait till they hear the end.

The next morning we devoted to snipe, there being some very good ground close to the house, and had a very pretty morning. We could manage to kill these delicious little birds, and succeeded in getting four couple and a half up to lunch-time; we then went off to beat some beautiful dingles, and got three woodcock, half-a-dozen rabbits, and a hare. We stopped there a week, and our bag at the end of that time amounted to fourteen couple of cock, eleven of snipe, two couple of teal and a wild duck, six hares, and ten couple of rabbits. No great bag, but enough to satisfy any moderate sportsman. There was plenty of ground to go over, indeed, I do not think we went over any of it twice, except for snipe. There were a few grouse on the mountain, but they were so wild they were not worth going after; but we saw some on several occasions.

Everything was done at the inn to conduce to our comfort; the cooking was excellent, and everything we had, plain but good. One day they would give us, perhaps, a nice young hen turkey for dinner, the next a goose, and then a small joint of well-hung Welsh mutton. I can only say that we enjoyed ourselves most thoroughly, so much so that we made up our minds to, and did, go down again about the middle of December, when the second flight of cocks was in, and had quite as good sport. Since that day I have participated in all kinds of shooting, which the British Islands can produce, in perfection, from the lordly battue to the single snipe; I have had ample cock-shooting in Ireland, grouse-shooting in Scotland, and at our own bonny little brown bird on the English stubbles, and I have had opportunities of shooting with such first-rate and experienced sportsmen as "Idstone" and "Sixty-One," and with many others of equal note; but to no time can I look back with greater pleasure than to that week's rough wild shooting when I killed my "first cock."

Now, when I add to all this that our bill, including everything for the week, was only

four pounds eleven shillings, I think I hit upon a good thing. Our bag of woodcocks made a great commotion amongst the sportsmen in our neighbourhood, as so many together had never been seen or dreamt of then.

For several years we made an annual excursion there with varying success, but were never disappointed in getting a fair amount of sport. Twenty years afterwards we went again, but the "Hotel" then had changed hands, had been newly done up and decorated, the furniture was of the gingerbread style, all French polish and paste, the carpets were new; and we badly missed our cosy old room, where we could smoke and have our dogs in, and do as we liked. The cooking was nothing like so good. The snipe-bog had been drained, woodcocks were not half so numerous. Poor Lewis was no more, and our bill was almost double, and that did not include many extras, introduced by the hand of civilization, and our pleasant little shooting quarters had altogether been improved out of all knowledge, which improvements we did not appreciate; and the place knew us no more.

## CHAPTER VII.

### OLD BEN.

"Nor on the surges of the boundless air,
Though borne triumphant, are they safe; the gun,
Glanced just and sudden from the fowler's eye,
O'ertakes their sounding pinions."

THOMSON'S *Seasons*.

I MENTIONED in my first chapter, and amongst one of my earliest acquaintances in the sporting line, a son of old Ben, whom I called an old poacher; but it must not be understood that I meant a poacher in the ordinary acceptation of the word, for I would not defile these pages with even a word in favour of such drunken, thieving, disorderly blackguards, and I did not mean to infer he was anything of that kind; still, if a man has no ground of his own, and does not take out a license to kill game, he must, strictly speaking, be a bit of a poacher, more or less.

"Old Ben," then, whom I will for the future call Ben only, was, when I first got acquainted with him, about forty years of age; but he had a lean, hungry, half-starved look about him, with high cheek-bones and lanthorn jaws, which made him look much older than he really was, and for many years there was very little apparent change in him. He was in the habit of coming to my father's to ferret the rats about the place, and that was how I became acquainted with him and his son. The rat-catching, in which I took great interest, led on to ferreting rabbits, and in going out after snipe, moorhens, etc., and also getting him to accompany me in my fishing, at which he was an adept.

In the winter-time Ben was always about with a long single-barrelled gun under his arm when he was on his beat, nearly always a large red comforter round his neck, a generally cold, shivery sort of look, particularly about the nose. Ben was one of the best shots, in the poking style, I ever saw, particularly at snipe. I don't think he ever missed. He used to say to me, "I can't think how you can miss them; they are as easy to kill as putting on an old

shoe." In dress Ben was rather an oddity: he was generally attired in a fashionably-cut but well-worn cast-off suit of my lord's (which I fancy he got for an occasional dish of trout, or a few couples of snipe), and being very tall and very thin, and his lordship shortish and stout, the fit did not do much credit to the maker. He was also generally thatched with a somewhat battered white chimney-pot hat (or which had been white once upon a time), with a black band round it. Now, my lord's head being large and round, and Ben's small and oval, the hat, unless filled (as it generally was) with a large red pocket-handkerchief, a rabbit net or two, a box of matches, and some other unconsidered trifles, had a tendency to get considerably low down on the back of his neck; and at all times, even when well loaded, there was great difficulty in keeping it in position. I don't think I could have done anything, either fishing, shooting, or anything else, with such an affair on the top of my head; but I suppose he had got accustomed to it, for he seemed as comfortable and as well satisfied with it as if it had just arrived new from its maker, and fitted him exactly.

Now all the poaching that Ben did was in the day-time, and openly, at least, tolerably openly, for except when he was on one of what he called his beats, he took his gun to pieces and carried inside his coat, with the end of the barrel and the stock stuck in either pocket. I have often seen him bring it out loaded, and with the cap on the nipple—rather a dangerous experiment to carry such an article, with the muzzle within three inches of your ear.

Now Ben lived only a few miles from the country-seat of the nobleman whose clothes he wore, whose estate was strictly preserved; but there were a few farms which were rather outlying, and which they did not trouble much about, and over which an old gentleman of my acquaintance used to have permission to shoot, though I fancy without having exclusive right to the shooting; and upon these farms there were some very marshy meadows, with a brook running through the middle of them, in hard weather a certain find for a wild duck or two, as there was a pond belonging to the same estate within four miles, where they were bred and preserved; and the meadows were a capital place for snipe, for I have had twenty shots of

a morning before breakfast there, and if Ben was with me, if I did not kill he would be sure to wipe my eye.

Well, the old gentleman only shot over these farms during September or October, and Ben used to act as marker, and generally kept an eye over the place for him, and I suppose on this account, and that no one from the Hall ever went there, or troubled about either the snipe or the wild duck, Ben got into the habit of doing it for them; at all events, he had been doing it so long that I really believe he fancied he had a right to it, and looked upon it somewhat in the light of his own particular shooting-ground; and I also fancy that it must have been pretty well known by his lordship, and winked at, that he did go there: hence the secret of the cast-off clothes, the trout, and the snipe. Let it be how it will, Ben used to take me there as if he had a perfect right to do so without let or hindrance, and I never heard anything to the contrary but what it was all right.

Ben, as I have said, was well up in all shooting and fishing matters, and put me up to a great many shrewd wrinkles, which I

found of great and real assistance. He it was who taught me how to get at a duck by walking to the corners and bends of the stream, thus not showing myself by walking all the way down it; also how to get an easy shot at snipe by walking down wind, and as they almost invariably fly against it, they have to come round you, and thus present a much easier shot. He taught me where to find all the best trout, jack, and perch, and after he had seen my first performance at partridges, he soon put me right, and told me where I failed.

"When you are shooting at a partridge," said Ben, "keep a little above him when you fire, and he'll fly into the shot; but mind you don't drop the muzzle of your gun at the very instant of pulling the trigger."

Now this is what most bad shots do; their aim may be true enough, but if, at the very moment of pulling, the muzzle is lowered in ever so slight a degree, the shot hits the bird in the rump or about the legs, and this is the cause of so many birds being tailored, and going away wounded. Remember then to hold on your bird for a moment after you

have pulled the trigger. It is but an infinitesimal portion of time between the pressing of the trigger by your finger and the time when the shot leaves the muzzle of the gun; still it is sufficient, if the bird has moved its self upwards, and you have moved the muzzle of the gun down, even slightly, by the time the shot reaches the bird that distance is sufficiently increased to account for the difference between killing your birds clean or wounding them. Hold on then, I say (you had better overdo it than underdo it), for a moment, and not let your gun drop, or attempt to *take it too quickly from your shoulder* after pulling the trigger in order to see what has become of the bird, and you will generally find him as dead as a herring.

By following this maxim I soon found the difference, and learnt to kill my birds clean and well. Of course very few men can do so always, but as a rule they will be successful. And what a pleasure it is in shooting, instead of having to run after a small bird in perhaps high turnips, or rough feg or fern. It discomposes your nerves, ruffles your temper, and is undignified, to say the least of it.

One morning I was taking a constitutional, and as I wanted to see Ben about some small matter, I took a walk up to his house, which overlooked the winding stream I have alluded to. The first thing I saw on entering the wicket leading up to the house was a couple of good fat pigs in the sty. Hullo, thought I, there is no want or misery here! On looking into the cottage, everything was as clean and neat as a new pin. Again, thought I, that does not look like a poacher's home anyhow. But on looking in at the open door I also caught sight of Ben, who had also instantly seen me. He jumped up at once, and was reaching something down from over the mantel-piece; when I had got in he had it behind him, but I was too quick for him. "Hullo!" said I, "what are you hiding that gun behind you for? Let me look at it." He hesitated a moment and looked guilty, and then held it out. It was my long-lost gun; I had recognized it at a glance. "How did you come by this, Mr. Benjamin?"

"Well, 'tis no use telling any lies about it; 'twas your gun, sir, and I got it some few years ago from your uncle, Dr. J——."

Well, I arrived at the gist of the matter in a

moment, which Ben corroborated. When my father made the unlucky discovery of my gun described in the first chapter, his immediate desire was to get rid of the poor old kicker at once; and not knowing how to set about it, had consulted with my uncle on the matter. Now, the old Doctor was rather fond of his stomach, and particularly delighted in a wild duck or a few snipe; and as Ben was in the habit of supplying him occasionally, nothing so likely as that Ben was the man to buy the gun, or dispose of it for the conspirators.

"What did you give for it, Ben?"

"Well, sir, I didn't exactly give anything for it, but the price was to be a pound; but the Doctor said he would take it out. As it made it light for me, I agreed; but I know the old gentleman had his money's worth. But I was to be very careful never to let you see the gun," continued Ben; "and whenever I was likely to meet you I never took it out."

"What sort of a killer is it, Ben?" said I.

"Well," said Ben, "if you load it light, there never was a better gun; but if ever you put in a heavy charge, it kicks most infernally."

We had by this time got outside the cottage,

when, having caught sight of some one walking up the stream with a gun, "Who's that?" said I, calling Ben's attention to it.

"Be hanged," said Ben (shading his eyes from the sun, as he had not got on the white receptacle for all sorts), "if it isn't that young Curnin again. I gee'd he leave to go up there one day, and he has kept on going there ever since, though I've a warned 'un off two or three times."

"Too bad," said I; "it is a good deal too bad, taking advantage of your good nature. The rights of property ought to be respected. I would prosecute him if I were you."

Ben looked doubtful, and the subject dropped.

Whenever I saw Ben sitting in our saddle-room of a morning, warming himself at the stove, and looking as cold and miserable as usual, and trying to light the damp tobacco, I knew that something was up; perhaps the snipe had arrived (for snipe are very changeable in their selection of their ground, according to the weather), and he had come to give me the first intimation of it. Now this certainly was unselfish of Ben, for he could of

course have gone and had the cream of the shooting to himself, and have got as much for what he shot probably as he would get out of me for his trouble; besides, he was immensely fond of the sport himself. Now, again, I say, why did he come to me? Because he was a sportsman; ay, for Ben was a true sportsman at heart, and shot for the pure love of exercising the art of shooting. Believe me, kind reader, when I say, that it is not necessary for a man to be rich or noble to be a sportsman. The same feelings are by nature implanted in us all, and there is many a heart that beats under a fustian jacket with as pure and genuine a love of sport as that which stands behind the sixty guinea breech-loader, or is carried on the back of the three hundred guinea Leicestershire hunter, only he, poor fellow, lacks the means and opportunities of gratifying its desires.

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

Let it not be thought that what I have just said arises from any cosmopolitan thoughts or ideas; far from it, for I am a good stickler for the respect due to the different ranks of life which the laws of that same nature has placed us in.

It happened, in the course of time, that the old gentleman who shot over the outlying farms I have mentioned went the way of all flesh, and departed this life; and his son, who was a crony of mine, had the shooting over the farms given to him entirely, and having determined to have it looked after properly, had appointed Ben to do so. Of course there was an end to his and my snipe-shooting, at least over this ground, and we had to look out for "fresh fields and (snipe) pastures new." I used to be asked sometimes to shoot over it with my friend. It was really good partridge ground, and I have had many a good day's sport there with Ben, of course, as keeper now; but he had not discarded my lord's old suit and hat for the ordinary keeper's stereotyped velveteen coat and breeches and gaiters. No, Ben stuck to his well-cut but (as they appeared on him) somewhat incongruous-looking garments.

Although the appointment must have added considerably to Ben's means, I believe he would rather have gone on in the old way over his "own beat." Now, the looking after the game on this place did not of course take up Ben's whole time, and he went to other beats

of his, which he had before somewhat neglected in favour of the home district, and I dare say got on very well; at all events, when I met him he generally had his gun (my gun sometimes) in his pockets, together with some odds and ends, the produce of it.

It was a great day for Ben when the gun Licence Act was passed, as he had nothing to do but pay his ten shillings and walk about with his gun over his shoulder, "like any other gentleman," as he said, whereas before he had to carry it in two pieces in his pockets.

I was sitting one day with my friend and Ben in a dry ditch, and with our backs to the bank, after having a capital morning's sport late in September, and just lighting our cigars, when Ben hunted in his pockets and produced something out of a rather unpromising-looking bit of newspaper, and handed it to me.

"Read that, sir," said Ben.

"Well," said I, after looking at it, "this is a gun licence all right."

Ben looked as if he thought it was something more.

"It's a ten-shilling 'certificate,'" said Ben; "that's what I asked for, and they gave me that."

"All right," said I. "But it only gives you permission to carry a gun; it does not authorize you to kill game."

"Ah!" said Ben, with an inexpressibly cunning and knowing look. "It don't say you bain't to."

We could not help being immensely amused, but I said to Ben, "I am afraid that cock won't fight."

When we began to smoke Ben looked for and always got permission to use his own black cutty; but he always had a terrible job, for what with his talking incessantly, the dampness of the tobacco, and the pipe (from being carried amongst the *débris* in his waistcoat pocket) being in a chronic state of "choked up," it was a work of difficulty. I think this continual pulling at his pipe must have occasioned Ben's cheeks to be so hollow and lanthorn-jawed, for he would, as soon as he saw smoke begin to appear, commence telling us some tale or other, and out the pipe would go again, the whole process having to be gone through again, so that he usually consumed nearly a box of matches at a sitting.

In the village where Ben lived there was a

sanctimonious old grocer, of whom is told a good story. He was very old and very white, for he had a white head of short stubby hair, always wore a white apron and white cotton stockings, which incased very small spindle-shanked legs; he had small, sharp, restless eyes, and a nose almost as long as one of his legs; he always looked as if he was minding some one else's business besides his own. He looked so sharp and keen, he put me in mind of a white jackdaw. Just as he was closing his shutters for the night, previous to shutting up his shop, the following conversation was overheard.

"Emanuel," called the old man.

"Yes, father."

"Have you sanded the sugar?"

"Yes, father."

"Ebenezer."

"Yes, father."

"Have you watered the tobacco?"

"Yes, father."

"Then come in to prayers."

Now, I fancy that this must have been the very shop where Ben got his tobacco, which would account for the difficulty in getting a

puff out of it. Besides, if he got it damp he kept it so, for his tobacco pouch was a bladder (and not at all a bad one either), which he always produced from some inner chamber of the big white hat. I think this hat was the most capacious and useful place of deposit the old fellow had about him, for if he had anything he had not room for anywhere else, into the hat it went. I am not sure that he did not put game in sometimes. When we wanted to see what was in it we used to ask him for a light; there were generally a good many lying about, besides a box or two. What he did before lucifer matches were invented I cannot imagine, as, if he used the old brimstone matches and tinder-box, he would have needed to carry a small timber yard about with him, to say nothing of the pleasure of a large dirty tin box on the top of his head.

Poor old Ben, whatever faults were his, he certainly had a good many good points in his favour: he was sober, honest, and ever ready to go anywhere or do anything he was asked, and I do not believe he had an atom of selfishness about him. He was an untiring walker, and about the best marker I ever came across. He

early put me up to marking down partridges. Men not accustomed to it are too apt to say they are down long before they are, when they see them go near the ground; the eye should never be taken off them until that peculiar flapping of the wings is seen which they make in settling. You see them go over a fence, and they are apparently going to settle; but if you do not see the flapping or poising the body for an instant, don't fancy they are down if you lose sight of them, but carry your eye forward, and most probably you will see them going over the next fence. Partridges take very long flights when they get strong, and late in the season, when they are best worth shooting; they also very often, when they are wild, run a good way after alighting, and I have always found it repay for the time and trouble taken in doing it, to go some way ahead of them, by going quietly under the hedges, or any way you can get there without disturbing fresh ground, and come back upon them. It outmanœuvres their tactics, as in all probability, if you followed them, they would be most likely either to get up before you got to them, or else run on into the next field, and then rise again.

Besides, if you are anywhere near the outside of your ground, you drive them back into it, instead of on to your neighbour's, where probably they would remain for the remainder of the day. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. I have found this particularly true in partridge-shooting, and extra pains and trouble are amply made up for in getting the birds well scattered about all over your ground. I never spared any pains to accomplish my object, and I generally succeeded.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DARTMOOR.

"Devonia's dreary Alps! And now I feel the influence of that impressive calm that rests upon them. Nothing that has life is visible."

THE large tract of country comprised in the forest of Dartmoor is rather grand than beautiful. Bleak and barren it is, no doubt, but as there is nothing like it in this little island of ours, a visit to it in good weather is very much to be recommended and enjoyed. Dartmoor, as a place for a healthy walking tour, even in winter-time, is, in my opinion, to a man of robust and good constitution, a place to be visited; the air is as pure as it can be, and in many places it is not too far off the sea for one to feel its bracing influence. The appetite given by a long tramp on its breezy, heathery downs is not easily to

be appeased, and the perfume in the air given by the peat smoke from some solitary cottage of a shepherd, or other denizen of the moor, is not to be excelled by the rarest essences that Piesse and Lubin can supply, or that can be distilled from the rarest and choicest flowers that grow in this or foreign lands—that is, to my nostrils, which have a strong tendency to prefer the sweet odours of nature to those of art.

On going into a cottage near the borders of the moor on one occasion, I complimented the goodwife on the healthy appearance of her children. She said, "Yes, the ones that live to get that size are hardy enough; but if they are at all weakly when young the weather soon kills them."

The following description of Dartmoor, given by the Reverend Samuel Rowe in his excellent work, is so fine, and gives so faithful a description of this grand tract of wild moor country, that I trust I may be excused for giving it here in full.

Mr. Rowe there says: "There are numerous tracts of the moor where, around the whole expanse, the eye cannot light upon a single

feature that is not pristine, intact, and natural. The entire scene in spots is of this untamed and primæval character. Not a trace of man's presence or occupancy is to be detected. Even the half-wild cattle which range other parts of the moor at pleasure seem to shun the swampy steppes of the central wilderness." Again he says: "The desert expanse has come down to us rude and inviolate from primæval times. The Tors pile their fantastic masses against the sky as they first frowned in the uncertain dawn of time. The granite wrecks of some original convulsion still lie scattered in most admired disorder. The roar of many an ancient river foaming along the rock-bound channel breaks upon the still silence of the waste as it did hundreds of ages ago. All bears the impress of unaltered duration and undisturbed solitude. Who with a particle of sensibility could climb its Tor-crowned peaks, traverse its rock-strewed ravines, or penetrate its trackless morasses without an irresistible impression that every object around belongs to a period of unrecorded antiquity? And who, when thus surrounded by the silent yet eloquent memorials of the mysterious past,

will not acknowledge their influence in 'withdrawing him from the power of the senses,' and in carrying forward his thoughts to the still more mysterious future? He wanders in a desert encircled with primæval mountains, and beholds nature piling all round, in fantastic and mimic masonry, huge masses of granite, as if to mock the mightiest efforts of human art. Vast and gloomy castles appear to frown defiance from the beetling crags around. But no mortal hand ever laid *their* adamantine foundations or reared *their* dizzy towers. Nature is the engineer that fortified the heights thousands of years ago; hers are the massive walls, hers the mighty bastions, hers the granite glacis scarped down to the roaring torrent below, hers the hand that reared those stupendous citadels, which fable might have garrisoned with demigods and beleaguered with Titans."

Some people may say this is what is often called "fine writing." Well, I can safely say, that in my opinion, formed from visiting the moor,—not once only, but many many times, in fact, I lived on it one whole winter,—I do not consider the word-picture he has drawn one bit too highly coloured.

But now I ask the reader, after reading the above, if he would think anything of Dartmoor as a field for sport? and yet I have had sport there, and enjoyed myself exceedingly. But woe betide any man who is beguiled into going there thinking to make a bag, or indeed even to hear his gun go off many times a day, unless under exceptional and rare circumstances and occasions; he must also be a first-rate walker, and not afraid of the weather or getting his feet wet. There is another drawback: on or near the moor in many places there are, or were, lead and tin mines, and every miner has a gun, or a dog, or ferret, sometimes all three, and if any unlucky hare or rabbit or bird is seen or heard of, he is pursued to the death. Again, if there should be a brood of young black game, the shepherds or their dogs manage to nail them when they are about half or three parts grown. You may occasionally see a black cock on the moor, but he is such a wary old gentleman, he is off before you can get within three hundred yards of him. At times I have seen a good many snipe on the moor, but you must know when

and where to look for them. Hard weather drives them entirely away. There are also plenty of golden plover, but they require a good deal of getting at, and you may go out for days without success, and again, you may make a fair bag if you have luck. But sport altogether is so precarious, that unless a man, as I have said, can walk, and loves the lonely moor with its stunted heather, its broken, wet, and boggy covering, its bleak and stony Tors, and its perfect stillness and loneliness, as I do, and unless he can put up with solitude, I would most strongly advise him not to go there. I have been there on many occasions; the first time was with my brother (now pioneering in the backwoods of Canada), which I will give a short description of. After shooting three seasons at partridges and other lowland game, I longed to have a taste of the moor and the mountain, the salmon stream and the loch. Scotland at that time of day was not to be thought of. I have had plenty of them all since that time though, but never enough. How I love the heathery hills, the crow of the cock grouse, and the wild notes of

the curlew, the rattling of the brawling river, and other highland sounds and scenes, and shall till the day of my death.

I had heard and read a good deal of Dartmoor, and in the absence of anything better resolved to visit it. And having sounded my brother Ted on the subject, and found him nothing loth, we packed up our traps (as few as we could possibly manage with), shouldered our guns, took a brace of spaniels with us, and having got on the coach at Bristol, went by it as far as Exeter; here we left our coats and rugs, and then resolved to do the other part on foot. We had a tolerable load each, consisting of an extra pair of boots and stockings, flannel shirts, etc.; and with our ammunition, of which we thought proper to take a good supply, we made the best of our way to the nearest part of the moor, and then put up at any small inn or public-house we could find (on one occasion we got accommodated at a small farm-house, but preferred the inns), from which we made daily excursions into the moor. We found the accommodation somewhat of the roughest, but it did not much matter to us, as we had made up our minds to

it. In the course of ten days we had paid visits to most parts of the moor by changing our place of abode three or four times.

I am not going to inflict upon the reader an account of our daily sport; it was not great, certainly, but we got enough to satisfy us. Our game consisted mostly of snipe and golden plover. Of the former we killed a good many, and the weather being mild and open (it was the early part of December), and being both good walkers and in rare condition, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

My brother was a better shot than I was, although, from having an injury to his right arm when he was a child, he shot from his left shoulder. I rarely ever saw him miss. He did once though, fortunately, for he missed me. I was getting over a fence in front of him, when, as he was letting down the hammers of his gun to half-cock, it went off; the charge passed between my arm and my body, and took a piece out of my coat—rather a close shave, but a miss is as good as a mile.

We made a great mistake in taking spaniels to Dartmoor. Very few spaniels are fit for the open, and though the ones we took were very

good, we found them of little use to us. What we ought to have taken was a good steady setter; old Sancho would have done admirably. By the way, I have always found the Irish setter better adapted for snipe-shooting than any other breed, they have such a quiet, stealthy, panther-like gallop, and wet ground seems to suit them exactly.

My next venture on Dartmoor was upon a part which I had rented for a few seasons. This had been preserved for years, and here we always had fair sport, including a very nice head of partridges; but this was not on Dartmoor forest proper, but on the borders of it, where there were many cultivated patches of ground. Still, much of the ground was of the same character as the moor itself; there was a sprinkling of game of most kinds, and in the season plenty of snipe and woodcocks. There were several nice coverts on the place, besides a lot of rushy, moist ground covered with short bushes, with small streams of water running through, just the very place for cocks—and cocks there always were. It seemed a favourite feeding-ground for them, as proved by their borings, and also a pleasant place to lie quiet

in during the day, for if you killed a bird in certain well-known spots on one day, his place was sure to be filled in a few days by another (woodcocks are very like trout in this respect); though I believe, as a rule, woodcocks do not spend the day in places that they feed at in the evening, but regularly go backwards and forwards from their homesteads to their pastures. But this particular piece of ground seemed well adapted, and was used for both purposes: they could have their suppers, and run off to bed at once without the trouble of flying home, though perhaps it would be recommended by the family physician for the woodcock to fly a mile after supper, as a walk to the same extent is said to be good for the human race; or in lieu of the flying, he might perhaps have recommended "Woodcock's Wind Pills."

In my wanderings about after duck, snipe, etc., I usually carried, when I was out by myself, a small fishing basket of rather open wicker-work (just lightly brushed over with black varnish to take off the newness and garishness) to put my game, luncheon, etc., in, as I always had a very great objection to put game of any kind into my pockets; in fact, I

hated pockets in the tails of my shooting-coats (breast pockets for carrying the powder, and shot-belts, could not be dispensed with), and would rather have abandoned the game where it fell than have it dangling about my person. Apart from the uncomfortableness of it, it spoils the game; when put in hot, wet, or bloody they do not keep half so long, or look so presentable to your friends. I think it is Colonel Hawker, in his excellent work on wild-fowling, gives directions for shooting-coat pockets being lined with oil silk to prevent the blood of the hares and birds from soiling your *breeches* (some people think this a word hardly to be mentioned, but I like to call a spade a spade). Fancy a gentleman lugging about a brace of great beastly, bleeding hares in his shooting-jacket pockets, with half-a-dozen brace of birds to balance them!

Well, I suppose that some people used to do it, but I never could; in fact, I always hated to be weighted in any way, it would be sure to spoil anything like brilliant shooting. The same keen old sportsman also gives some wonderful receipts for dressing calico with boiled oil, and other abominations, to make waterproof

shooting-coats. What with the game in the pockets, and the oil-coats, what pleasant customers they must have been. What would the gallant old wild-fowler have given for one of the best mackintoshes of the present day? I also disliked being bungled up about the legs with gaiters, and would at any time rather get wet than wear them; and as for thorns, I utterly despise them, though I have had my legs so covered with their holes and scratches, as to scarcely have a space an inch broad that was not covered with them. I believe I must have been the original inventor of (the now almost universal and pleasant garment for shooting) knickerbockers, for very many years ago I used to cut off the legs of my trousers about six inches below the knee, and have them sewn round the bottom, and so wear them loose. They did away with the flopping about your ankles, and wet and muddy trousers, and were cool and pleasant; and another recommendation was, they did not cost much. It is true that they must have made one look very much like the schoolboy with

> "His short striped trousers, and now and then
> A stripe upon his jacket too."

But what did it matter, they were first-rate to walk in.

Well, when we made our first excursion to Dartmoor, we had fully intended taking the fishing basket, but somehow it had got left behind. We took no servant, and whenever we arrived at the small public-house which formed our head-quarters for the time being, made immediate inquiries for a guide of some sort, as it is very difficult, and at times dangerous, work to penetrate far into the moor; what I really mean to say is, to find your way back again. I have on several occasions been lost for many hours in fogs, to which Dartmoor is very subject, and which come on very suddenly, and have sometimes found myself several miles from the place where I thought I was. I believe the best plan is to sit still under a stone or hollow till it clears; but that would not be very pleasant at all times, particularly if you had to sit there all night, as is very probable, and with the prospect of being devoured by wolves or shepherds' dogs, which, as old Jorrocks said, "would be much of a muchness, as far as the comfort was concerned." Ah! with what delight have I heard the voice of

that same shepherd's dog under similar circumstances.

One rough guide, then, for the time being, had to carry such game as we killed, and as (if he had been left to himself) he would have been sure to have shoved it into his pockets, or somehow or other disposed of it about his person, I invented a game-carrier, a sketch of which I give. The merest tyro will of course at a glance see how to use it; but let any one making one not fall into the error I once did, in using a spare shoe-string (which I always carried in my shooting-jacket) instead of string, being short of this article; it slipped, and we lost two birds in consequence. My game-stick was cheap, simple, and effective, something after the style of game-carriers of the present; but in the absence of such a swell article, how often have I been glad to make use of my own simple expedient. Any one can make it, and the materials necessary are a hedge stake, a couple of yards of strong string, and a red-hot skewer. The loop being folded up and again made into a loop upon itself, so as to form a double loop, as shown on the right of the sketch, the birds' heads are popped in,

and there they are hung up to dry, cool, comfortable, clean, and respectable, with their feathers nicely smoothed down. If the strings are made long enough, two or even three birds may go into each loop.

Some years after this, when I had become pretty well tired of shooting in enclosed counties, and was hankering after the wilds of Dartmoor Forest, its primitiveness and freedom from restraint, my eye caught an advertisement in the 'Times' of a furnished cottage to be let for a season on the borders of Dartmoor. I at once entered into a negotiation with the advertiser, and eventually took it. He described the shooting as comprising almost every variety of game, including black cock, woodcock, snipe, partridge, and hares. The first two would have had irresistible charms for me if they had been there in any number. No doubt all the birds and animals which he said, existed there; but alas! how few and far between; however, I knew what to expect, and was not disappointed. The cottage was everything I could wish, having been built purposely for a shooting and fishing box; and barring the difficulty of getting provisions,

and the misery of being confined to the house for a whole fortnight through an injury to my foot in climbing one of the Tors, and on another occasion being completely snowed up for a similar period, I enjoyed myself after my own fashion and to my heart's content.

One piece of luck happened to me while I was laid up with a sprained foot. I had never up to this time had the good fortune to kill a right and left at woodcocks, though I had had several chances. Something always went wrong, I stepped in a hole just at the moment of flinging up my gun, or some tree or bush always was in the way. If none of these *contre-temps* happened, then I bungled in some inexplicable way, though I was generally very successful in killing cocks, having succeeded in attaining the necessary coolness; but I did manage it at last when least expected.

One day, when I had got tired of my books, and hardly knew how to get through the time till dinner was ready, one of those half-poaching, half-sportsmen sort of fellows I have mentioned before, who are sure to make the acquaintance of any sportsman who comes into their neighbourhood, and who had made

himself useful to me in several ways, came up to my cottage and said, as he was coming home from his work on two different evenings, just as it was getting dusk, he had seen two woodcocks crossing a certain place in the road just about a quarter of a mile from my house; they were coming from the direction of an immense wood, and making their way to their feeding-ground. Now, as I knew the habits of the bird always induced him to take the same regular flight to his supper, I determined to hobble up there; and having told my friend to come up again in the evening, I dismissed him after taking minute bearings, from his description, as to the exact spot where he had seen them crossing. This information made the afternoon pass very pleasantly, and when the time drew near, with the aid of a stick, I made the best of my way to the spot indicated. I waited a long time, and got very cold, and was just fancying they had gone some other road, or they were going to stay at home that evening, or, after all, it might be a hoax, when I saw my two long-billed friends coming sailing quickly along. I had only just time to pop down my head and get into position, when

they were upon me. I was under the fence, and they were just past me before I was discovered. In an instant they were off like two swifts, diverging right and left; but they were not quick enough for the leaden shower which reached them, and down they came in good style.

I was uncommonly cocky, the reader may imagine, and went home a great deal quicker and better than I had gone up, and it very nearly cured my foot for a time. I have often asked myself the question whether it was quite a legitimate and sportsman-like thing to kill the poor birds after dusk, and on the way to their feed; but then, I argued that circumstances alter cases, and in this case it was excusable.

Not very long since I was mentioning this circumstance to the head-keeper of a well-known Welsh squire, who is great in the dog line, when he said, "Oh, that's *nothing!* I'll be bound Mr. L—— has done that fifty times in his life." I said, "Oh, I suppose that's *something*." I swallowed the dose, *cum grano satis*, and a pretty good-sized grain too. All I know is, that I have never done it since, and

I only recollect having the chance once, when a couple got up under my feet. I was mooning about something at the time, and was so utterly flabbergasted that I only collected myself in time to get a shot at one, which I missed.

After being laid up for a fortnight it takes one some days to get your wind. It would not suit every man's taste to be entirely by himself in such quarters as the place I have attempted to describe. It is true at times it was rather solitary, as I had only one old woman-servant in the house, and I was obliged to content myself with the companionship of my two dogs; but it suited my taste exactly. The wind also at night would have driven any one disposed to the blues to fancy it was rather melancholy, as when they, having gathered strength in travelling across the vast extent of moor, where there were no trees to break their fury, came down in all their strength, the house would shake to that extent that it seemed a miracle it was not blown out of the ground. The rattling of the doors and windows would be quite a finisher to a nervous person. But

then I rather like to hear the wind howl (I cannot say I like to feel its power though, as I much prefer a wet day to a windy one) when, after the fatigues of a long day, I sit comfortably over the fire of an evening, just tired and sleepy enough to know I shall get to sleep directly I choose to go to bed. Altogether I always was, and always am, delighted with the grand, wild old moor.

Then as the days get longer with the new year, and February begins at times to show signs of the coming spring, how delightful is a day's trout-fishing in one of the many small streams which have their rise in the moor. I had a nice little stream within a hundred yards of my cottage door, where I could always get a few fish for breakfast. I hardly like to think of them, they are simply delicious; and with the keen appetite which I always had when at my far-off and quiet bachelor quarters, and with some home-baked bread, obtained through the kindness of a moor farmer about a mile off, and some pure fresh butter (without the slightest or most remote taint or suspicion of butterine or olearine, or any other such frightful abomin-

ations), new-laid eggs, and home-cured ham, what more could sportsman want? It is a breakfast fit for an emperor, if only such pampered patrician appetite could venture on such plebeian fare. And then for dinner, trout again, if you like, a well-hung joint of real Dartmoor mutton, done to a turn, a small saddle for choice, followed by a fresh-killed snipe (both snipe and woodcock are better for being cooked fresh, the trail gets dried up by keeping) on toast, the whole supplemented by good, wholesome, home-brewed beer, and topped up with one or at most two glasses of good old whiskey and water cold, and without sugar. Not a drop more, my dear reader, not a drop, though it is very nice. What more could mortal man possibly desire? Man wants but little here below, but requires that little to be very good of its kind. That is the great secret; it is not signifying much what you eat or drink. Then if you should be a smoker, tone the whole down with your favourite weed, whether in the bowl of a pipe or cigar; the former I have preferred for many years. The more simple a man's tastes the more easily they are gratified, and the more

satisfaction he gets out of the goods the gods supply; but I have always made it a rule, however plain, to have the best I can get of its kind.

Well, if with the little comforts I have alluded to, a man cannot make himself comfortable, always supposing his object be sport, health, and exercise, then I think he must be hard to please.

The old Dartmoor sheep, which were very small, are being gradually improved off the face of the earth; as the auctioneer says, "you have more wool and more mutton." That is quite true, but they have not the quality of the old stock, nor the flavour, but the mutton is still excellent. Everything is being altered in these fast days of railways, steamboats, telegraph wires, and electric lights, and in a few short years the whole face and character of Dartmoor may be considerably altered. Already railways have penetrated its bleak and barren wilds; weekly markets have been established in all the little neighbouring towns, and even what were not long since mere villages; the very moor men are losing their primitiveness and simplicity, but whether for the

better it behoves me not to say. As Dartmoor was for ages, and as I have seen it, I love it and glory in it; such as it may be in future years will not be my lot to know.

The trout in most of the Devonshire streams come in very early, and in the moor streams they run very small; but what they lack in size they make up in numbers. The streams are so bright and clear, that they require a lot of catching, and old Isaac's disciples must keep themselves well out of sight in order to succeed. Long before the fly is on the water a good dish of fish may be got with the worm; but it is not every one who cares to fish with that unpleasant kind of bait, and by many it is considered unsportsmanlike. The story goes of an old Scotch fisherman saying, when it was suggested to him to try the worm, and with a most offended and dignified air, "I am but a poor mon, but I never fash with wurrem."

Well, I am not exactly of the old Scotchman's mind. I do not altogether fancy worm-fishing, it is true, but I do not despise it, and when fish can be caught in no other way I take advantage of it. I never was a very great hand

at "thrawing the flee," but next to spinning, which is my particular forte in the fishing way, I much prefer catching fish with the artificial fly than the natural bait; but of all streams I know, the rivers of Dartmoor require the fisherman, more than any other, to bear in mind and carry out this principle, namely, to *fish far off and fine.*

If any of my readers should be tempted to pay the moor a visit, I earnestly recommend them to take their thickest boots, and very warm and thick but light clothing, consisting of nothing but woollen garments; not a particle of linen should be worn, as the weather is at all times treacherous and uncertain, and the walking being hard, weight of clothing is not desirable. If any such there be, I can only wish them health and strength to enjoy the beauties of nature in some of her wildest and grandest moods, though they have charms for me which many others might not see in them, and return to more civilized, though perhaps not happier, life, with a constitution so invigorated by regular life, pure air, and hard exercise, as to make them look back with unalloyed pleasure at their visit to Dartmoor.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE BIG TROUT.

"Or haply on some river's cooling bank,
Patiently musing, all intent, I stand
To hook the finny glutton; his weight
My taper angle bends; surprised, amazed,
He glitters in the sun, and struggling pants
For liberty, till in the purer air
He breathes no more."—SOMERVILLE.

TROUT-FISHING of any kind is now very difficult to get, and for really good fishing, the disciple of Isaac Walton must travel far, and fish fine and far off. I think railways have done as much to cause this as they have done to bring the sport of hunting within reach of hundreds who were previously debarred from it. Fishing was at one time considered to be the poor man's sport, but I doubt very much if it is now; I don't mean catching roach and gudgeons, and such like, for I never did, and I am sure I shall never now acquire the

taste,—bottom-fishing is, I grant, the poor man's sport, and with it may he be contented, and live long to enjoy it,—I mean the fishing which you require to serve a long and patient apprenticeship to, before you can expect to arrive at any degree of perfection. Many, nay, perhaps most, do not get beyond mediocrity; that is my case. Although I have tried my best to arrive at the higher grade, I am free to confess I never got within a long throw of the pinnacle, that is to say, fishing with the artificial fly, as I have mostly devoted myself to spinning. It is said that no man really enjoys it thoroughly unless he can kill fish with flies of his own manufacture; I have no doubt it adds immensely to the pleasure.

A friend of mine, who was a first-rate hand, with whom I was out one day, a very bright sunshiny one, with the water as clear as crystal, when not a fish would look at our flies, said to me, "Did you see that gentle rise near the opposite bank?"

"Yes," I said, "I did; but I don't think it's a fish."

"It is," he said, "and I'll catch him. Have you a kid glove in your pocket?"

I had, and he cut a tiny bit of the white part from the inside, put it on the point of his hook, and threw over the spot where he fancied he had seen the fish rise, and had him in a moment; and in less time than I have taken to write it, he was safe in the landing-net and kicking on the grass, a nice fish of half a pound. This probably may be nothing new, but I had never seen it done before. The same day he popped a bit of worm on to the tail fly and dropper, and let them sink into a deep pool, and very soon hooked a trout and a perch, both of which he landed.

Nearly all trout-fishing worth having is now strictly preserved; but there are still districts where it can be had. I will point to one in which plenty of fishing may be got—I mean the wild district of Dartmoor and the borders of it; but the sportsman must be satisfied with numbers, as the fish run small in a general way. But they are most delicious eating, and with some brown bread and butter, and an appetite acquired on the moor, I don't envy the man who could turn up his nose at them.

Tavistock, where tickets for the Tavy and

the Tid can be procured by the day, week, or season, is not a bad place to stay at, as the railway takes you to many places; but bear this in mind, the farther you get from the rail the better chance you get of sport, as a great many good fishermen who know the water go out from Plymouth, Exeter, and the towns in the neighbourhood.

I once came across two trout which were so gorged with the May-fly as to appear quite drunk and helpless. It was just at the commencement of the season, and very hot; they were rolling about on the top of the water, and when I tried to drop a fly into their mouths, which they were continually opening, as if gasping for breath, they just dropped quietly down a foot or so and came up again; they took no further notice of me. I waded in and tried to pop the landing-net under them, but they had just enough life left in them to avoid it; I did succeed in getting one of them into it, but he rolled out again before I could fling him out.

The weather also is so constantly interfering with sport, that a man always needs to live on the banks of a stream to take advantage of the

best days. Many a weary tramp I have had to a stream a long way off, only to find the water as thick as a duck's puddle, from sheep-washing somewhere above; and you might as well fish in one, for any chance you have of catching fish.

Nearly all fly-fishers profess to despise the worm; but I have known many who, on the sly, were not above taking advantage of his seductive wrigglings, when they could not fill the creel in a more legitimate way. I knew one old gentleman in Devonshire, who scarcely ever returned with an empty basket, when others, who had been out all day, had not risen a fish. I got the secret out of a boy who used to attend him. He said his master would start off whipping the stream in the most orthodox fashion; but if the fish did not rise, he pulled a box of worms out of his pocket, clapped one on to a hook, and set to work, the boy keeping a sharp look-out; and if he saw any one coming, gave timely intimation to his master, who soon whipped on his fly again, and thrashed away in the most innocent manner possible.

"Any luck, Hedger?" said the new-comer.

"Yes, killed a brace of nice fish."

"Very odd; I can't get a rise. What fly are you using?"

"A small black gnat."

"Very strange, so am I; but I'll persevere."

And away he went, and as soon as he was out of sight, on went the worm again.

I never was very fond of worm-fishing, but I had one stream where I never could catch fish in any other way, except when the May-fly was on; in fact, I never saw them rise to a fly of any other kind. The first trout I ever caught was with a worm. I was looking over a bridge on a by-road on an April morning; the stream was very shallow, but underneath the bridge, and a little way beyond, it was some four feet deep, and in this hole I saw sailing about very quietly a fine trout. He was deep down in the water, and I did not look long; but away I went home, and got my rod and some worms, which I happened to have ready for perch. It took me about two hours before I got back again, but there was the fish still; in my anxiety to be at him, I had put my rod together and baited the hook on my way, and it was not long before he was well hooked, and

landed on the bank. I thought him a whopper and a beauty, as he was; and he turned the scale at over a pound. I had no sooner caught him than I began to have suspicions that I might be poaching, and bustled off home with my prize as fast as I could go.

On thinking the matter over, I came to the conclusion that there must be more fish further up the stream; and soon after called upon Sir H. T., the owner of the land, and asked him if I might fish up his stream?

"Certainly," was the kind reply. "But I doubt if you will find any fish there."

I said, "I hope to convince you to the contrary;" and away I went to have a look at the water.

It was very narrow, only about five yards wide, and very winding; many of the bends forming quite an angle. The stream was very shallow in places, and so overgrown with nettles, thorns, and bushes as to make it difficult to see into it; but although the stream was generally shallow, at every bend there was a hole, sometimes three or four feet deep, and in others much more. But what a sight met my eyes, such a one as I had never seen before

—in almost every hole there was a magnificent trout rolling about, and showing his golden sides. I took stock of every one of them, and what was more, from the undisturbed state of the bushes and nettles, concluded that the existence of these fish was not known; so I determined on having a good day at them on the morrow. I made every preparation, but scarcely slept at all that night thinking of them; and such sleep as I got was disturbed by all sorts of visions of monster trout, and entanglements in the bushes, which was a forerunner of what actually took place.

I was early on the ground; but the getting my rod through the bushes was attended with considerable difficulty, so as to keep myself unseen. But they were the most unsophisticated trout I ever came across, and notwithstanding my inexperience, and all the difficulties, I succeeded in catching several very good fish, and was not long in taking up a brace of the best to Sir H. T., who was very much amazed, and not less pleased.

I lost a good many fish from having no one to help me land them, and getting caught in the briars; but a better day's fishing I never

had in my life. At the end of the day I had killed five and a half brace of fish, weighing fourteen pounds, and did not forget to take up a fair quota to the squire.

When the May-fly came on I killed a great many fish by dapping with the natural fly; but I never caught one in this stream in any other way than with the worm or the natural May-fly; indeed I do not think throwing a fly on this water would have been possible, except in a very few places.

Worm-fishing in swift-running streams, with Stewart's tackle, is quite an art of itself; and many a good day I have had in the streams running through those splendid woods near Lidford in Devonshire; and I have caught many a good dish of fish in that way in that extraordinary natural phenomenon, the celebrated Lidford Gorge.

I had another stream, about four miles away from this first place I mentioned, where I subsequently obtained the sole right of fishing for about two miles. This river was of a different character: in places very deep, but in others, where the water ran very sharp, there were beautiful gravelly scours; and it was in

these, and the deeper water running at the sides of the scours, where I killed a great many good fish by spinning either the natural minnow or the phantom. I never tried worm-fishing in this stream, neither did I ever see a single fish rise at any other fly than the May-fly, and when that was in season it was very killing, and many a good basket of fish by both those means I have got out of it. I knew at last every inch of the stream, and could almost tell to an inch where to spin and get a rise. I felt so sure of always killing a fish with the spinning minnow, that on one occasion, when Mr. P. L——n was staying with me, the conversation turned on fishing, when I made him a bet, that I would kill a two-pound trout for breakfast next morning.

I was up by daylight, and had a pony ready for me, and away I cantered with my creel on my back and my rod under my arm. I went to the lower end of the water and fished up; I did all I knew, but not a rise did I get, although I fished nearly all the most likely places; but I rather fancy that in my hurry to get to well-known spots I neglected many others, which perhaps might have yielded a

fish. I was rather chagrined at my ill-luck, and had only one more cast to make, when I felt the well-known electric shock, and away went a good fish, taking out a good bit of line. I was standing on some hatches, the water being a good depth below me. After a time, and two or three grand jumps clean out of the water, showing him to be in rare condition (but I was not to be done in that way), I lowered the point of my rod every time he jumped,—this jumping took the metal out of him,—and very soon after I got my fish dead beat, and he came floating on the top of the water. The pool was surrounded by bushes, and how to get him out I knew not; so at last made up my mind to trust to the strength of the tackle; so I got hold of the line, and very gingerly and cautiously lifted him up till he was on the hatches at my feet. He was very firmly hooked, or I should never have got him up; it was a ticklish job, but he was basketed.

I was back in time for breakfast, much delighted at my success, though I lost my bet, as the fish was short of the weight by a quarter of a pound.

There were not very many trout in the stream, but what there were generally ran a good size; and in one particular place I had often seen a very large trout. He was always in some deep water underneath a large hawthorn bush, which grew close down to the water. I had often tried my friend with worm, a live minnow, and the natural May-fly, but never could succeed in getting him to look at anything; for it was very difficult to get my bait into, or on, the water without being seen myself. He was a wary old gentleman, and the sight of a twig moving aroused his suspicions, and although he did not bolt off like greased lightning, as most trout do, he made himself scarce by dropping gradually and quietly out of sight. This trout bothered me a great deal, and I was determined to have him somehow; but how? that was the question, which I turned over and over in my mind, again and again, without coming to any satisfactory conclusion; when one morning there were some shrimps for breakfast, and a happy thought struck me. I wonder whether one of these would tempt my fastidious friend; at all events, thought I, I will make the attempt,

and no sooner decided on, than I proceeded to carry it out. I selected a few of the best shrimps, and put them in a tin box; I selected my finest and strongest gut, with a good-sized hook, which I carefully tried the strength of by fixing the hook into a soft piece of deal, and giving a good hard, steady pull. All right, no trout that ever swam can pull harder than that; and away I went.

It was a dull, rainy day in June, just the day for fishing. I would not trust myself to peer through the bushes to see if his highness was at home; indeed I proceeded on tip-toe to within half-a-dozen yards of the bank, when, having got all ready, I crawled towards the bank, pushing my rod very carefully underneath the bush. I had only about a yard of gut out beyond the point of the rod, and it was with some difficulty I managed to get out another half-yard or so of line; then when I could see through the undergrowth of weeds and nettles on the bank that my bait was near the water, I lowered the point of the rod, so as to allow the shrimp to sink about two feet under water. Scarcely was it got to that depth when I saw a flash, and at the same

moment felt a terrific tug. He had gone at it instantly like a tiger, and went straight off with it, taking out about twelve yards of line. "Now, old crafty, your last hour has come; you have eaten your first and last shrimp; no more turning up your nose at all my dainty offerings." My first care was to get the rod free from the hawthorn bush, which I succeeded in doing; watching the direction the line was in, I made out that the fish had gone across to the other side of the stream.

"Come on," said I to my man (who was behind with the landing-net), "you shall soon have him in the net; but be careful, whatever you do, not to touch the line." The fish had as yet made no signs. "I think," said I, "I had better send the hook well into him, as the skin of the shrimp is thick."

Relying upon my test of the hook and gut, I gave a most vigorous upward stroke or turn of the wrist. Oh, Lor! I shall never forget it: the line flew out of the water, the shrimp with the hook remained in the fish, and I never saw him after. It was the jerk that did it, for the gut had parted just where it was whipped on to the hook. It served me perfectly right; but

the vexation and disappointment were not at all lessened by knowing that it was entirely my own fault. I often looked under that bush afterwards, but never without a feeling of the most intense disgust at my own stupidity and clumsiness.

I remember once having a very odd adventure with a salmon. I was staying at that cheery little place, Lynmouth, North Devon, when one showery morning I was walking about with an umbrella; the tide had nearly gone out, and I saw something floundering about just at the mouth of the river Lynn; the water was getting shallower every moment. I waded in and found a good-sized salmon, who had stayed a little too long, trying to make his way out to sea. I tried to bag him with the umbrella by way of a landing net, and once succeeded in getting him into it; but he made very short work of it as a landing-net, or for its original and more legitimate construction, so I shut it up and began belabouring him with it. He was in water nearly deep enough to cover him, all but his back, and upon that I showered blow after blow; but the umbrella being a light one, and the water

Salmon-fishing on the Lynn.

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taking off half the effect, we had a terrible scuffle; the fish making desperate efforts to get away. At last I managed to deal him a regular cracker, and he gave up the ghost, and I hauled him out, a fish of over fourteen pounds.

Late in the season a few salmon may be got up the Lynn by fishing with a good-sized worm. A short, stiff rod and strong tackle are necessary, and you must give it him pretty stiff, or he will surely make his way down to the sea. It is not a very artistic way of fishing for salmon; but when you are at Lynmouth you must do as others do, that is to say, if you want to catch salmon. Apart from the fishing, Lynmouth is one of the most delightful sea-side villages I know.

I don't think there is any excuse for catching trout with a net, and yet I used to assist in doing so once a year, for many years; but my assistance did not, I confess, go much beyond the looking-on part. One of the kind of men called gentlemen farmers used to have a fishing party every year, about the beginning of June, just before the hay harvest commenced, and a very enjoyable day it was,

except for the killing trout in such an inglorious fashion; but the true fact of the case was, the owner was no fisherman, but was very fond of the fun of netting, besides which, he was a hearty good fellow, and liked to assemble a party of kindred friends, and make a day of it, and we did too. We used to assemble, six or seven of us, about eleven o'clock; the stream was not far off, so we set to work at once; but it must be told in all fairness, that it was so overgrown with bushes and brambles that it was almost impossible to fish it in any way with a rod and line. I have seen one man in my day, and only one, who would have thrown a fly there, and that was old David Jones of Ross, whose equal I have yet to see. The stream was shallow nearly all the way up, and the flew nets were put in about fifty yards apart, and the stream was well beaten in between. There were a few deep holes, in which the casting-net was used, where generally a good fish was hauled out. There was sure during the day (particularly after lunch) to be a little rough horse-play going on, and one day one of the party thought he should like to try a throw with

the casting-net; it hitched in a button at the back of his coat, and in he went headlong.

At one o'clock, sharp, luncheon was announced, and we all adjourned to the well-known spot, a large elm, and there was spread out a first-rate feed, to which ample justice was done; then cigars and pipes, and a most enjoyable idle hour on the grass, when work was commenced again, and kept on till five. Every fish under a pound (fishermen's weight, of course) was put back in the stream if it was not injured by the net. We usually got ten or twelve brace of first-rate fish; but I could not help regretting their capture in that way, as they would have afforded excellent sport for a whole season to any lover of the art; but, however, so it was, and I enjoyed the fun with the rest. An excellent dinner, such as only a first-rate farm-house, where the mistress superintends the cooking, can turn out; the cream and butter, fresh and pure, which are such essentials to good cookery, not being spared. A cigar in the open air after dinner, and a rubber or game at Van John, as it was called, wound up a really pleasant day.

I had some capital trout-fishing one season, when staying at a country-house about nine miles from that well-known fishing locality, Hungerford. The fish did not run very large, but I caught several over a pound, and saw one fish of quite four pounds. I was told a curious circumstance about this stream. Two years before I was there, it, being on the chalk, had entirely disappeared and remained quite dry for many months. Now, where did this big trout come from? as he must have been at least four years old. I have always understood that fish do not go far from the place where they are bred, and I know that fish have homes, and stick to them; for if you know a trout to go to a certain place when disturbed, he invariably makes for the same place, what country people call his "hoult," and if you kill him, within a very short time his late residence is sure to be occupied by another, but not quite so big a fish, seeming to bear out the old lines—

> "They shall take who have the power,
> And they shall keep who can."

As long as the larger and more powerful fish was in existence, he held his castle against all

intruders; but the moment he is vanquished, it was occupied by a less powerful member of the finny tribe.

I have often heard of dogs catching fish, and while I was at this place I saw a very clever retriever catch two trout in a shallow stream, and was told that he often performed a similar feat.

Trout are occasionally found living entirely by themselves, without having any others of the breed anywhere near them; how to account for this I do not know. They must, I suppose, somehow or other have wandered away from their own locality, and not being able, or perhaps not inclined, to make their way back again, have thus been forced to live the life of a recluse. The only solution I can offer is, that they may have been swilled down by a flood; but in a general way they know how to guard against that, and betake themselves to pools, and such shelter as may be afforded by stones and pieces of rock.

I remember two instances of solitary or hermit trout. One occurred in the river from which I take my "*nom de plume*," in a part where there were no trout within several miles;

and where the water was very deep, forming a mill-head. A tonkin across the stream had to be repaired, and the water was let off, leaving one deep hole; some people dragged it with a net, and got out a trout which weighed over three pounds. Another was one for which I can account, as I put him with several others into a large pool in the river formed by some hatches. The other fish which I had put in I never saw again; probably they fell a prey to pike, of which there were a good many; but the one I have mentioned, being two pounds when I put him in, was too big for them. For two seasons I used to watch him sailing about, when the water was still, underneath the hatches; I never tried to catch him. One morning I saw a trimmer set on the opposite bank, and asked the miller not to leave it in at night. I was not afraid of my trout taking it by day, but they will take almost anything at night. The miller pretended to be very proud of seeing the fish, and apparently took as much interest in him as I did. He said, "No fear of his taking that; it is a big roach, which I zet to catch a jock." But I am afraid that my mentioning the night

bait put it into his head to do the very thing he promised not to do, for my poor trout was never seen afterwards—by me, at all events.

In walking down Piccadilly this afternoon, I saw in a picture-dealer's shop-window four new paintings which very much pleased me, and I feel sure that they would send a thrill of delight through the heart of any real fisherman. They are so full of life, character, and so true to nature, and I feel sure that no man could have painted them unless he had known how to handle the rod; whoever he is, he is an artist as well as a painter. The subject is "Salmon Fishing," which forms the top rung of the ladder of the fisherman's craft, and bears the same relation in that art as woodcock shooting does to the gunner, or fox-hunting to the hunter. The four pictures are, "The Rise," "The Leap," "The Struggle," and "Landed," and each one is a perfect study.

## CHAPTER X.

### FOX-HUNTING.

"The sport of kings, the image of war, without its guilt, and only twenty-five per cent. of its danger."

So says our old friend Jorrocks, and, by Jove, he is right; it is truly a kingly sport, and proud I am to see our own Prince of Wales (whom I have seen in the field more than once, and right well he goes, and appears to enjoy it too), who will one day be king, take such an interest in it.

I was once asked to shoot a fox. It happened in this way. I was shooting with a friend at—well, I won't mention the place, an out-of-the-way one, where there were no fox-hounds, and foxes were not preserved. In the course of a day's covert shooting I caught sight of a fox crossing a ride, and could not resist the

temptation of giving him a rattling "Tally ho!"

"What was that?" said my host.

"A fox."

"Why the devil didn't you shoot him?"

"Shoot him!" said I, horrified (I believe my hair stood up more firmly than it did when I heard the owl); "shoot him! I would as soon think of shooting a baby."

"Never mind," said he, "old David will have him before to-morrow."

When I came down to breakfast next morning that fox's brush was lying on my plate, and a delighted smile (I thought it was a broad grin of the ugliest kind) upon everybody's face. I was not at all pleased; I thought it too bad a joke, and it took away my appetite.

In my introduction I said, that these being reminiscences of my earliest experiences only, I should refrain from giving more than my first appearance with and *entry* to fox-hunting, that which is so well called *par excellence* "the noble science;" but I cannot after all quite so easily dispose of so important and engrossing a subject (if my pen runs away with me at any time I must beg the reader's pardon,

and trust he will forgive me; I have been so used to be run away with that I have got into a habit of doing it myself, I fear) without saying a few words about that glorious sport I loved, and still love, so well. But they must be few, as it is my intention at some future time, if I have the approval of a kind public, to give some of my later experiences, together with some accounts of favourite horses, their tempers and characteristics.

As I have, I think, before stated, my father never would sell an old favourite horse, but when they were worn out, had them shot and buried, or, what is still better (for it is a pity to waste good meat), sent them to the pack of hounds with which the best part of their lives perhaps, and that very likely not the least pleasant part, had been passed; for horses like the excitement of hunting and the music of the hounds as well almost as their riders. See what life the sound of a horn will put into an old hunter if he hears it accidentally; they bring out their best powers, and excite a spirit of rivalry amongst their kind as pleasing as it is inspiriting to the riders on their backs. What more then, I repeat, can the good old horse

desire or deserve, in the way of a decent and respectable funeral, than through the jaws of his late and dearly loved companions in the chase?

Having had, then, so good an example set me, I did justice to my bringing up by following it; and whenever I had horses that I had ridden for several years, when they got worn out or otherwise unfit for service, I had them shot, or did it myself; and the latter was for two reasons—first, that there should be no reason to suspect that the horse would be used in any way through any mistake; and the next, that I could make sure that no cruelty was practised. I believe that knackers generally stab them in the heart with a long knife. This no man who valued his horse would like to have happen to him. The shooting of a horse is a very easy matter: it only requires a steady hand and good nerves, and if done in the right place, either in the forehead or just behind the root of the ear, his death is so sudden and so painless, that I have often seen them drop stone dead, and not move a muscle after the shot was fired. Now, I have had and shot a good many horses of my own, and

also shot a good many for different friends, who asked me to do so, not because they thought I liked the job, but because they felt sure I should do it without making a mess of it.

My pocket was never a very large one, and therefore I preferred horses of the "have been" sort, that is to say, horses of figure and character, perhaps one that has carried "my lord," the "Hon. Crasher," or "young Rapid," and made his mark in the shires, but had become somewhat too slow or too sticky for such first-flight *customers*, or perhaps one that had been scored in a place or two, or might be fired all round or otherwise blemished; and although out of such horses a great deal of work may be got, and a great deal of sport seen, still they are not the horses men ride who can afford to give their two to three (or even more) hundred guineas for. I will take a horse that has had his maybe five or six seasons in such first-rate and brilliant company, but is now to be given up. I am on the look-out for such an animal, and I get him for, say, forty to fifty guineas; he will carry me to hounds, with good riding, careful

nursing, and good luck, for many seasons in the provinces, though he may not be good enough for the *créme de la créme* of the shires. I get a good-looking horse, with blood, form, and breeding, a bold and safe jumper, a fine mover under you when on the turf (though perhaps he might be a bit dicky on the road), and all over a gentleman. Could I get carried as well by buying a fifty pound horse, which never was nor will be worth any more? I think not; at all events, that is my opinion, after many years' practice.

I will give an illustration of another sort of animal. Five-and-thirty years ago my sister gave me a good-looking roan mare, which had come into her possession under peculiar circumstances, which it is not necessary to mention here. She was about three parts bred (by a well-known provincial horse called Shortwaist), and at the time I got her about four years old, fifteen three in height, a rare galloper, with very strong quarters, but with short thick shoulders. These two last, with her tremendously high courage and fiery temperament (though perfectly good-tempered), made her a dangerous animal to ride. She

rushed at her fences, was a very big jumper, as her immense back and large quarters gave her very great power; but her low bad shoulders made her jump sometimes short, and if there was a wide ditch on the other side, very likely you would come a regular crowner, whereas a good, long-shouldered horse would have extended himself, or had a leg to spare. It was not that she could not jump wide enough, for I have known her to cover five-and-twenty feet over a common sheep-hurdle in cold blood. She was, as I have said, a rusher at her fences, and if you would not let her go when you got near it, she would be up in the air plunging about, and somehow or other would have the fence, be it what it might; and she would have gone at a house on fire, and would, in her blind recklessness, jump upon anybody or anything. I have nearly knocked out of their saddles more than one man, jumped once upon a harrow, and another time into a faggot pile stuck up on end. She got at last more temperate, and became very clever, was first-rate at stone walls or timber, and there was nothing in height that she could not jump; but a wide

ditch on the landing side was very often a cause of coming to grief. But before she became clever and handy, how many and what severe falls did I not get with her. I think I had as many falls with her as with all the horses I have had put together, and they have not been a few, and some of them I feel and bear the marks of to the present time. I rode this animal for seventeen seasons, and never knew her beaten; she was never sick, sorry, or had a dose of physic. When she was about eight years old I was bothered a good deal to sell her, and was offered seventy guineas for her (but I dare say I could have had more), which others beside myself considered a fair price; but I would not sell her, as she had been given to me. I bred from her when she was twenty-five years old, and she threw twin fillies. When she was twenty-seven I shot her, or, rather, had her shot, for I had had her so long I could not find it in my heart to do the deed myself.

I did not intend this to be a chapter on horse-shooting, which I dare say some of my readers will think it is. I dare say every one has heard at some time or other a man say of

some extra good horse, he was a *big-hearted one.* Now, I believe this is literally true, for I have noticed over and over again, that many a real good one, that had the pluck and power to go at best pace through dirt and clay, was found to have, when opened, a much larger heart than ordinary; it was so in the case of the roan mare I have mentioned, and many others I could particularize.

Now, the conclusion I wish to draw from all I have said is this—that a man of small or moderate means can get more sport and be better carried by what is called a good screw than in any other way. Talking of screws reminds me of a good story told of a certain well-known captain, commonly called Bob M——. The captain at one time was not quite so well off as he is now (and I am heartily glad that he is, as a better sportsman, a more congenial companion, or a better fellow never lived), and used to ride good-looking, well-shaped horses, but they were of the "have been" stamp. His stud groom was a queer fish, a thorough Yorkshireman, and was apt to speak in plain language, and to put it down in black and

white as well; for in writing to his master on one occasion about corn bills or some other necessary matter, he put a P.S. at the bottom of the letter—"Sir, the screws are well." Cool and laconic.

I remember reading somewhere or other, though I cannot at the present moment call to mind where it was that I read it, a remark that you would find more really good fellows at the covert-side than you would in any other assembly of a like number of men in any other place; and I firmly believe this to be substantially true, though all men you see out hunting are not sportsmen; the very fact of their being there goes far to prove that they are there with the idea of their being thought or fancying themselves so. And what a thoroughly English scene is that same covert-side, with its brilliant array of mostly well-dressed, well-mounted men, from the tip-top aristocrat, with his faultless bit of pink, his immaculate and well-fitting leathers, his highly-polished boots, his bright, long-necked spurs, mounted on his good-looking, powerful thorough-bred hunter, both of them looking as cool and unconcerned as if an immediate

gallop across country was the last thing they thought of, to the quiet-looking man in a black coat and white neck-cloth, as clean as a new pin, riding a sporting-looking grey, with a very corky look about him, and slightly wide and ragged hips, down to the stout little gentleman on a corresponding cob, who will gallop down the lanes and scramble through the fences all day in the wake of the better mounted and more pretentious customers, all the time fancying he is hunting, and who will be sure to talk louder afterwards, have gone at a better pace, jumped more and bigger fences than anybody else. All is quiet, business-like, and gentlemanly. Then look at the hounds, as there they sit or stand,

In all their beauty's pride,

with their quiet and staid demeanour, with their long, sagacious, judge-like faces, looking at this moment as if a fox would be quite safe in their midst. The master is having a word with the huntsman, many of the real sportsmen critically examining the hounds. All at once the word is given to move off, and away trots the first whip, followed by the hounds,

with the huntsman in their midst; they go very quietly to the covert, which perhaps is a fine patch of gorse on the side of a sloping hill in a crack country. The whip canters off to take up his post at some quiet corner, as much out of sight as possible. The hounds, still keeping close to the huntsman, begin to look all alive, and at the least sound of the huntsman's voice, or a slight wave of the hand, they bury themselves in the gorse, and nothing is to be seen of them except a waving stern or two, and now and then a hound jumping a bush which he cannot get under, with his brilliant-coloured coat flashing in the sun. A whimper or two is heard, then a deep note proclaiming a find. In a moment the whole pack joins in the glorious cry.

"Heav'ns! what melodious strains!
How beat our hearts, big with tumultuous joy!"

The crash of music has come, the fox is found, and is now fairly on foot. The field behave admirably; they are stationed at the top of the gorse, under the eye of the master, where they can see and hear all that is going on; but not a movement do they make. The

huntsman is forcing his horse through the gorse, whether he likes or not. He presently gives them a cheer; he has evidently seen the fox. The cry of the hounds is still heard, making their way down to the opposite corner to that where the whip is stationed. All at once they are perfectly quiet; the fox has turned, and they have overrun it. No, the field can see the whip's cap in the air, but no sound comes from his lips; he is watching the fox going away right across the open, and it is not until the fox disappears over the crest of some rising ground that he claps on his cap, and gives a rattling, unmistakable scream. But the horsemen have seen the fox as well, and are all alive and impatient for a start. Hardly is the whip's "holloa away" ended, before the huntsman is out of the gorse. He had followed the hounds down. The whip is going, and points to the direction in which the fox has gone; but it is hardly necessary, for first one hound then another appears, each one puts his nose to the ground and feels for the line. The huntsman gives one toot of his horn, and every hound is out of the gorse; they seem with one accord

to sniff the intoxicating vapour the fox has left behind, and away they go, heads up and sterns down, to the most beautiful music that mortal ear ever heard.

By this time the field are on their legs, all is hurry skurry and bustle. Where is now the quiet-looking swell, the unimpassioned Parson on the grey? Why sweeping down like an avalanche, with twenty others of a like stamp, the regular first flight of some of the finest riders and best horses in England, all determined to be first, followed by a crowd of less determined and not quite so well-mounted horsemen; but all anxious and eager to be going in the best way they can. Where out of England can such a sight be seen? Nowhere in the wide world. It is a scene to make the blood of the most phlegmatic course through their veins at double-quick pace, to thrill through their hearts to the very core. The hounds have now been brought to their noses, and are fairly settled on their fox; the field are after them as hard as they can lay legs to the ground. But where am I?—if I had been a fox-hound I should have been drafted for

a skirter or a babbler long ago. I am continually getting off the line, going away at score, or babbling away on some fresh scent.

I believe I said I was going to give the actual experiences of a young sportsman—a boy,—and boys were boys in my day, and not the little men they are now or apt to be,—and here am I very nearly describing a splendid run in a fine country; but I am brought up all at once with the unpleasant reflection that I have seen the meet, the draw, the find, and here am I left standing by the side of the gorse, without even the advantage of being mounted on my old pony to scramble after them; and here I must give it up, as the last of the rush has just disappeared in the distance. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I must give it up for the present, hoping at some future time to give the run in full. But then it must be one in which I took a part.

I shall now very shortly have to bid the reader farewell (for a time only, I hope); but before doing so, I will give one anecdote to prove that fox-hunters of the present day

are not the mere hunting, drinking, hard-riding sort of men that many think—*no, I won't say think*, I will rather say have thought—who have only heard of them or known them at a distance, whatever may have been the character of many of the fox-hunting generation of half a century ago; and even then they were not all of the Squire Western stamp, take Mr. Meynell for instance, the father of fox-hunting. The present fox-hunter is a gentleman in every sense of the word; and at no previous time was the noble science so well understood, or were there so many well-mounted, well-educated, and well-intentioned men in all the relations of life assembled to take part in it, as there are at an English covert-side at the present day.

Now for my story of Mr. Assheton Smith, well known as one of the best huntsmen and finest riders of his day. After much controversy it has been decided that to Mr. Assheton Smith is due the invention of gun-boats, now so much in use in our own and other navies. Our fleet stood in great need of such help while it lay helpless off Cronstadt during the Russian war.

"Some years since," says the author of Mr. Smith's 'Memoirs,' "when the Duke of Wellington was staying at Tedworth, Mr. Smith communicated to the great captain his notions respecting gun-boats. The Duke listened, as he always did, with attention to Mr. Smith's suggestions, but gave no opinion at the time respecting the subject of them. Next morning, as they were walking on the terrace after breakfast, the Duke said, 'I have been thinking there is a good deal in what you said last night about these gun-boats, and I should advise your writing to the first lord of the Admiralty,' which Mr. Smith did, but received no answer. Some time after, when walking down Regent Street, he met the first lord, whom he knew personally, and asked him in the course of conversation if he had received his letter containing suggestions for introducing gun-boats? The first lord replied, 'That he had, but that the Admiralty could not pay attention to all the recommendations made to them.' Upon this Mr. Smith took off his hat, and turning away with a stately bow, observed, 'What his Grace the Duke of Wellington considered worthy

of attention I think your Lordship might at least have condescended to notice.'"

Yet within ten years from that time, one fleet of our formidable 'Vixen Craft' was at sea, and another being fitted out for service. Little perhaps did the spectators, who proudly gazed upon the swarm of their dark hulls at Spithead, know that the projector of them was a fox-hunter, and that to a fox-hunter's clear head and far-seeing eye was the gallant Wildman mainly indebted for the single little vessel (the 'Staunch') with which he demolished four large junks in the Chinese seas. Yet it has been said that Mr. Smith was a fox-hunter, and nothing more. The verdict of true Englishmen will be very different.

In these reminiscences I have said very little about dogs. That is a subject upon which I am most mad, and upon which I could dilate till the end of time. I have thought of dogs all day, dreamt of dogs all night; in fact, I am doggy to the backbone. I have had dogs of all kinds (that is to say, sporting dogs, for I leave other breeds out of the question, as the "fancy" is not at all to my taste), and I believe I have had upwards

of a thousand in my day, many bad ones and many good ones. I have kept otter hounds and beagles, and at one time I had a very nice and unique little pack, all black and tan. Setters and spaniels are the dogs I like best to shoot to and as companions; but of all breeds of dogs, I am of opinion, and I am not alone, that there is no dog in the whole wide world to compare for one moment with a thorough-bred English fox-hound of the present day. Look at him as he is drawn on the flags, with his long, intelligent-looking, high-crowned head and thoughtful, clear brown eye, his fore legs straight as gun-rods, his round, cat-shaped, compact feet, his beautiful light neck set into sloping, racing-like shoulders, deep chest, wide ribs, well-arched loins, gaily carried sedge-feathered stern, wide powerful quarters, well let down hocks, his beautifully-coloured, brilliant-looking coat, and added to all, his magnificent and stately carriage; again, I say, there is nothing in canine shape that can come near the fox-hound. But what a different animal he is when a fox is before him: he is then full of activity, fire, and animation, from the time

when the fox is first found in thick covert, through which he tears regardless of all obstructions, till you see him with a breast-high scent, going at best pace with his head up and his stern down, racing across the open; then if he has in his energy overshot the scent, the magnificent way in which he flings and dashes to recover it; or again, the patience and perseverance with which he feels for and works out a cold and stale scent,—all are deserving and worthy of our highest praise and deepest admiration. No wonder, then, the fox-hound is so highly prized; no wonder men are enthusiastic about fox-hunting; no wonder that men ride as they do to see him work. The cost is as nothing, the trouble is as nothing, falls are as nothing, difficulties are as nothing, when measured with their joys and pleasures. May fox-hunting then flourish in all its glories till time shall be no more.

I must now reluctantly take off my cap and bid my readers farewell, hoping that we may meet again, if fortune should so favour me. In doing so, I wish them, with all my heart, health, strength, and nerve to enjoy the glorious

sport of fox-hunting, as I have myself enjoyed it, and hope to do again; but if the fates should decree it otherwise, I will, deeply thankful for the past, live upon the memory of other days, and still struggle gamely on till

> "The last scene of all, which ends
> This strange, eventful history."

THE END.

*R. Clay and Sons, London and Bungay.*